

His Soul is Marching On to Another World; or, the John Brown Isekai
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His Soul is Marching On to Another World; or, the John Brown Isekai

by [CabbagePreacher](#)

Summary

The land of Gemeinplatz is a land filled with fantastical creatures, adventurers looking to slay them, and heroes looking to distinguish themselves from the adventurers. The most common of these heroes are those who come from Earth, who enjoy a most leisurely time with their cheat skills. It's a perfect world, the utopia of those who wish to become overpowered and get their own power fantasy, where even the most everyman of the everyman can pull themselves by their bootstraps and become a hero.

To satisfy the needs of heroes who can't find function like a normal human being (which most of them can't), the lucrative Gemeinplatz slave trade crushes the dreams and ruins the lives of hundreds every day. These slaves endlessly labor, in the harems of so-called heroes, at the mansions of the landowning "heroes", and as rare materials for various dubious magical spells.

In a world that looks down at them as demi-human, where the ruling class has no incentive to end this profitable trade, in which their oppressors are overpowered as all hell, what hope is there for the slaves?

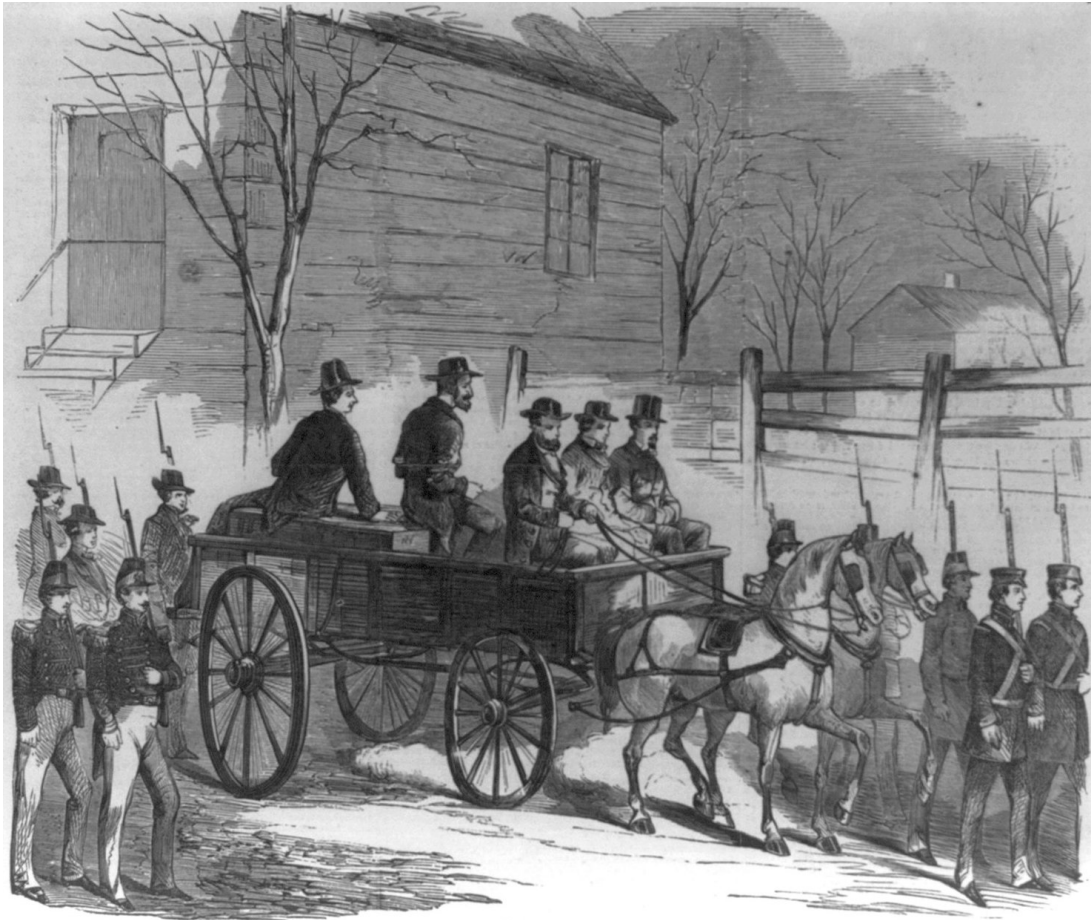
What hope is there, is named John Brown. This time, he'll finish what he started.

Notes

Finally had some spare time, decided to import the John Brown Isekai over to AO3. Huzzah!

(Note: This is the full-length novel version of the other John Brown Isekai I've posted. This one has a different plot etc.)

Chapter 1: [Prologue] They hung him for a traitor, themselves a traitorous crew.



JOHN BROWN RIDING ON HIS COFFIN TO THE PLACE OF EXECUTION.—FROM A SKETCH BY OUR SPECIAL ARTIST.

2nd of December, 1859 (11:00 AM)
Charles Town, Virginia

Around two-thousand soldiers were gathered around a carriage. Inside the carriage was not an honored guest or a high-ranking official. No, guarded by two-thousand was just one man convicted of treason. The man was on his way to the gallows, sitting on his own coffin.

The man on the coffin had no chance of escape; all of his allies had been driven out of the city, there had not even been a minister available that could dare visit the man lest they draw the ire of the town.

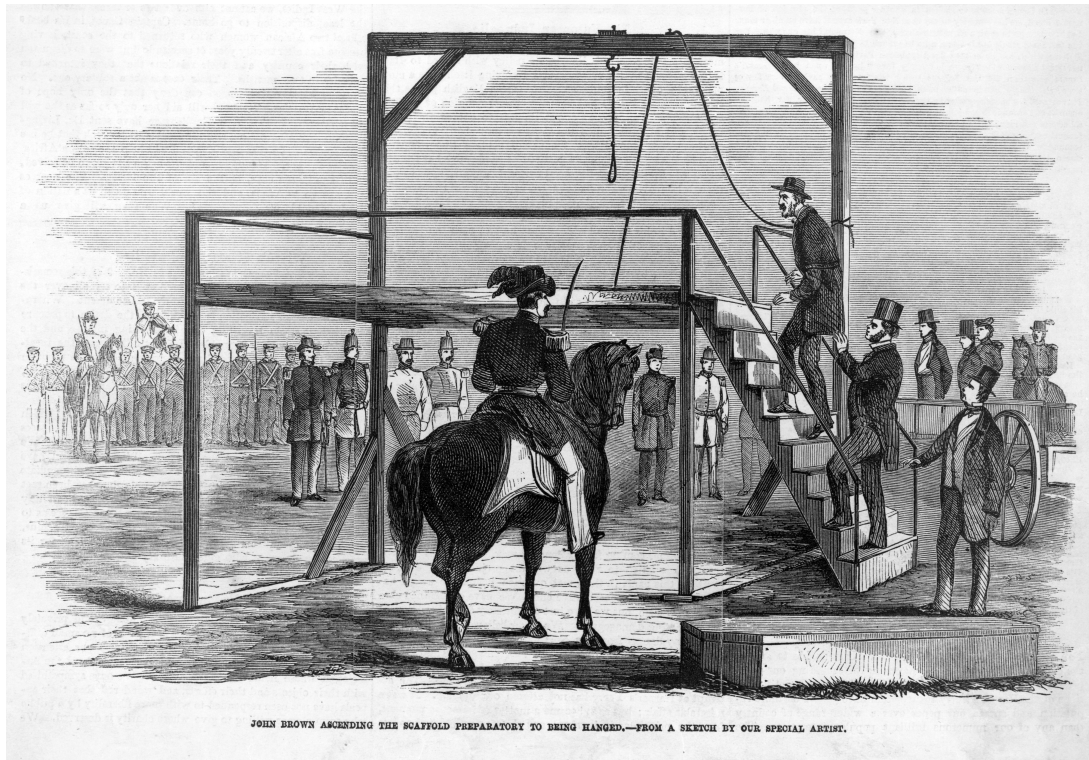
Yet, despite his upcoming, inevitable death, the man seemed calm. His mortal body would soon lie moldering in a grave, that much was inevitable. He had already finished his divinely ordained mission, spending his last month in prison responding to letters, talking to reporters, doing everything to advance the cause he had fought for all his life.

The man was too old to run away and become a fugitive; he had accepted that he'd commit one last great act, that of becoming a martyr.

The carriage finally came to a stop in front of a wooden scaffold that had a noose prepared on top of it. He walked in a composed and calm manner, as if he was going for dinner and not to his death.

He uttered what'd be his last words to the sheriff.

“This is a beautiful country.”



He had a clear view of the surroundings from the platform. Two entire battalions of troops were protecting him, a mostly ordinary old man if not for his unordinary acts. They had even put a cannon directed at the scaffolding. It was clear that he had succeeded in his death; he had succeeded in striking fear in the heartless heart of the South.

If they were so afraid of one old man, what'd they do when others inevitably followed in his footsteps?

The noose, made out of cotton from South Carolina, was finally tied to the man's neck along with a hood covering his head.

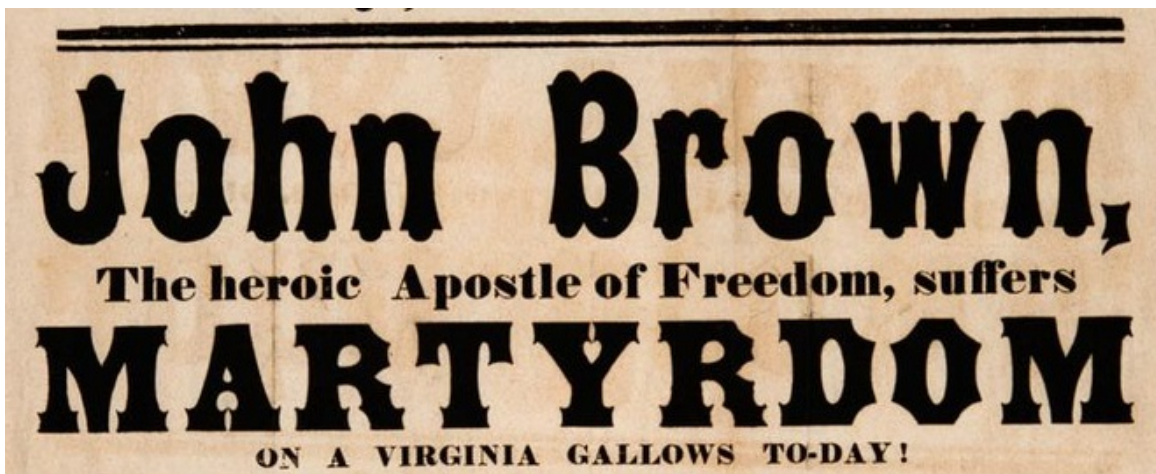


The audience was silent. The troops had done their best to make sure no one sympathetic to him was nearby. The circle of men around him was so large that nobody outside the circle would be able to hear him if he had decided to hold one last speech.

Yet, the troops could not drive off the man's greatest collaborator that still listened to him, for the man knew that the Lord was still here with him.

He had instructed the sheriff not to make him wait. Without much delay, the noose tightened around his neck following a short drop.

He was left to slowly suffocate.



Yet, something odd happened before he fully lost consciousness.

Suddenly the man's vision turned fully white, as if some divine light had suddenly engulfed him. He felt as if he was floating on top of clouds, not suffocating anymore.

He heard a faint voice that seemed to come from a great distance "Damn it, I asked for Jon Brown, not John Brown!" The voice seemed to be extremely annoyed. "How do you people mess up so badly! There's a whole bloody century and a half between the two!"

The aforementioned John Brown was greatly discombobulated. He had been ready to die. He was definitely not ready for whatever was happening.

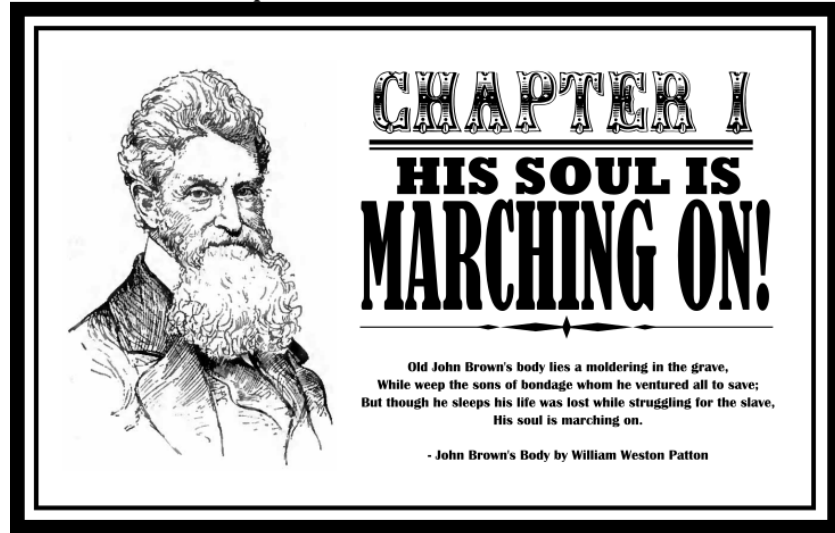
"Alright, just send him anyways. I can't bother with fixing this mess."

The white void around Brown slowly faded, turning to a black void while he finally went unconscious...

[Oh dear, you are dead!]

Chapter 2: Chapter I - His soul is marching on!

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 1



2022 - The Cabbage Preacher

*Old John Brown's body lies a moldering in the grave,
While weep the sons of bondage whom he ventured all to save;
But though he sleeps his life was lost while struggling for the slave,
His soul is marching on.*

- John Brown's Body by William Weston Patton



68th of Winter, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

Today was a beautiful day like any other. The last few precious snowflakes were slowly floating down to the ground, racing each other in a futile attempt to cover the earth with a thin sheet of heavenly white. The birds had come back from a tactical retreat, celebrating once again the defeat of General Winter.

These mountains, consisting of earthly dark green with disappearing hints snow-white that were slowly beginning to brim with life, were quite a sight to behold.

In the midst of these scenic mountains was 19th century radical abolitionist John Brown, who had no idea where he was. The scenery around him was too ordinary to be Heaven, too unscorched to be Hell.

He would have loved to ponder the implications of not having died after being killed, yet the old man was currently unable to do so with clear conscience.

Brown's physiological needs overrode his need to think about where the hell he was. The old man was currently without shelter and in dire need of finding sustenance (he hadn't exactly eaten much before his hanging for he, like any other rational man, thought that he should be dead right now).

Thankfully, Brown was on a plateau that sat on a lower part of the mountains. There were a few trees, newly blooming plants, and plenty of melting snow to serve as water if need be. Cutting through plateau was a desire path, showing that there was larger fauna near the area.

His first instinct was to examine the surroundings for anything edible. Brown saw some bushes nearby that looked like they might contain something of note, yet, he couldn't recognize the odd, green pear-shaped berry that crowned them. The other plants in the area too looked nothing like anything he had seen in the American Northeast and Midwest.

Going around eating strange berries he found on the side of some road would likely lead him to a more-than-upset stomach, an unwanted psychedelic trip, an early second grave, or all of the aforementioned three if he was to get especially unlucky.

All of the above were, to put it lightly and in the politest of terms, most disagreeable.

Brown decided that he'd first quench his thirst before racking his brain further on the topic of eating. Thankfully, snow was mostly safe to drink without any treatment; he picked a clean pile of snow from the floor and slowly melted it in his mouth.

A now athirst Brown noticed, on a slight cliff that was reachable with a little bit of parkour, a cave that had blended into the surroundings. Its small entrance was covered with vines, making it hard to notice at first glance. It seemed like good shelter, another thing that he currently needed.

Brown also needed something to warm him up after having picked up snow with his bare hands. He found a suitable piece of flint discarded next to the road and a dry piece of bark off of one of the trees. He took them and climbed to the cave, laying the bark in front of it. The old man took out his belt, which had a prong fashioned out of steel, and struck its prong against the flint. Sparks came flying out of the makeshift fire starter; soon the bark was on fire. Brown briefly warmed his hands before heading back down to find some dry twigs to further fuel the fire.

His grand adventure to acquire a stick or two was interrupted when he ran into three... Things. He couldn't exactly find the words to describe them; the closest he could get was "amorphous blobs of jumping transparent liquid with a bluish tinge". Brown had been hanged exactly a hundred and twenty-seven years before slimes ever got popular.

He – in great awe mixed with greater confusion - watched the curious creatures hop around, before the creatures were bored of hopping and decided to tackle the seemingly weak old man that had been rudely watching them.

He was definitely not expecting to be tackled by sentient balls of goo. The first slime hit Brown so hard that he almost fell to the ground. Nevertheless, Brown was not a stranger to combat. The second one was less fortunate; it met the furious fist of a combat-ready Brown, who now understood that sentient balls of goo were potentially dangerous.



The second slime lay defeated, unmoving on the ground. The first slime attempted another attack, but it joined its comrade on the ground after having an impromptu appointment with Brown's other fist. The third slime, clearly the most rational of the trio, ran away from the man who had so viciously slain his comrades in cold not-blood.

Having completed the classic isekai ritual of slaying low-level mobs, Brown was left with two semi-intact balls of goop on the floor. He was curious about these creatures; he leaned to take a closer look.

The slime left over from the slimes had consistency similar to honey, and also smelled temptingly sweet. Brown wasn't the only one to be tempted; a scaly, lizard-like bird, with a similar size to an eagle, suddenly snatched one of the dead slimes and took off to the skies with it. Brown decided to take the slime that was left over. If a bird could eat it safely then he should be able to do so too.

On the way back to the cave Brown also completed his mission of finding dry sticks. He made a proper fire by adding aforementioned sticks on top of the burning wood bark. Warm, with shelter, and with food (?), Brown had quickly climbed the bottom-most floor on the hierarchy of needs. Finally, he had time to do some pondering and planning.

He sat in front of the warm fire, thanking the Almighty for providing him with this meal, scooping up bits of slime with his hand while his brain was racked to the fullest.

Where was he? Clearly, he wasn't dead nor was he in the afterlife. This place was most likely not on Earth either, he had never heard or read about amorphous, sentient blobs existing anywhere on Earth.

It was clear, to Brown at least, this must be a work of Providence. It couldn't be an accident that he was here, clearly, the Lord must have sent him here for a purpose.

So, what tune did the Lord want to play with His instrument? That was the chief question that was currently occupying Brown's mind while he dined.

★ FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM ★



Today was a beautiful day like any other. The last few precious snowflakes were slowly floating down to the ground, racing each other in a futile attempt to cover the earth with a thin sheet of heavenly white.

The famous mountains of Curry, consisting of earthly dark green with disappearing hints snow-white that were slowly beginning to brim with life, were quite a sight to behold.

In the midst of these scenic mountains, walking on a path, was one earthling otherworlder whom had been titled "Watanabe Generico" by the few comrades he had acquired. He was a young man with a protagonistly look befitting his title: short black hair, distinct lack of facial hair, and a twig-like physique.

Watanabe had been a gamer in his past life, having spent many hours grinding for levels in MMORPGs and whatnot. He had gladly accepted the offer made to him after his death; to use his gaming skills to save the land of Gemeinplatz (or something vague, he wasn't sure what he had been told)!

Yet, the ambitions of Watanabe didn't stop at just a vague notion of "saving the realm". In his previous life, Watanabe had never had any chances to have any relationships with women other than his mom and his sister (which thankfully were *not* romantic relationships). He wanted to rectify that in this new world.

Watanabe thought of himself as the peak of masculinity, an alpha male if you will. He was a self-declared intellectual, spending copious times watching videos on YouTube and listening to podcasts by self-declared "independent thinkers".

He thought, and the people that he listened to told him, that society on Earth must have brainwashed women into ignoring true men like him, what other rational explanation was there for his previous maidenless predicament?

It couldn't have been the fact that he only showered only once a month, nor the fact that he never went outside, and surely, this predicament couldn't have come about because he always looked down at any woman he was with.

No, surely, a man like him would seem so attractive to the traditional women of this world that he'd soon gather a harem... Right?

He couldn't really afford to wait, so he had used his "hero"-ing money to buy a slave. "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." is what he thought when he had made the purchase.

Following him, bound in chains, was some slave whom Watanabe simply referred to as "Rye Bread", he couldn't actually bother to learn how to pronounce her name. Her actual name was Kyauta, a woman around two heads taller than him.

She could've easily beat Watanabe to death, she really wanted to do so, if she was the one who was armed and not in chains.

Other than having someone around him that wanted to kill him if given the chance, Watanabe Generico had another problem: He wanted something sweet to eat. This otherworld lacked in conveniently accessible sugar found on Earth. An absence of Mountain Dew had been troubling him since the beginning.

Watanabe seemed to hit the jackpot, only in terms of his quest for sweets, when he chanced upon a plateau in the lower regions of the mountain. There lay some trees, and under their protective shade laid bushes which had green pear-shaped berries crowning them.

Is this edible? I shouldn't put myself at risk, he thought. He plucked one of the berries and would have handed it over to Kyauta if her hands weren't busy being in chains. "Hey, be grateful. Your gracious master's giving you a generous gift."

Kyauta recoiled in response. "Sir, they are not edible, these are-

"What, you think you know better than me, woman? I'm a modern, intellectual man from the 21st century, you should listen to my wise words. Come on, don't be shy, say 'Aaah'..."

He got a prompt response from Kyauta, that being a spiteful spittle of spit being spat upon his now dispirited face. He was mad, quite mad, frothing even. He raised his generic broadsword to retaliate with unjust punishment, his anger trapping him in a state of tunnel vision.

Then, without a chance to even scream or shout anything, Watanabe suddenly collapsed. He hit his head on the cold hard ground with great force that ended his pitiful life in another world.

Watanabe Generico had failed to notice the fact that John Brown had been slowly sneaking up to him, a novice mistake to not be aware of any wild abolitionists while adventuring. Brown had simply done the Lord's work by caving his skull in with a large boulder.

Brown quickly checked the many pockets of Watanabe Generico, finally finding a set of keys. He got up, intending to free Kyauta from her shackles, only to notice that she was already a few meters away. She had been doing the sane thing by running away from the stranger who had bashed someone's head in a few seconds ago.

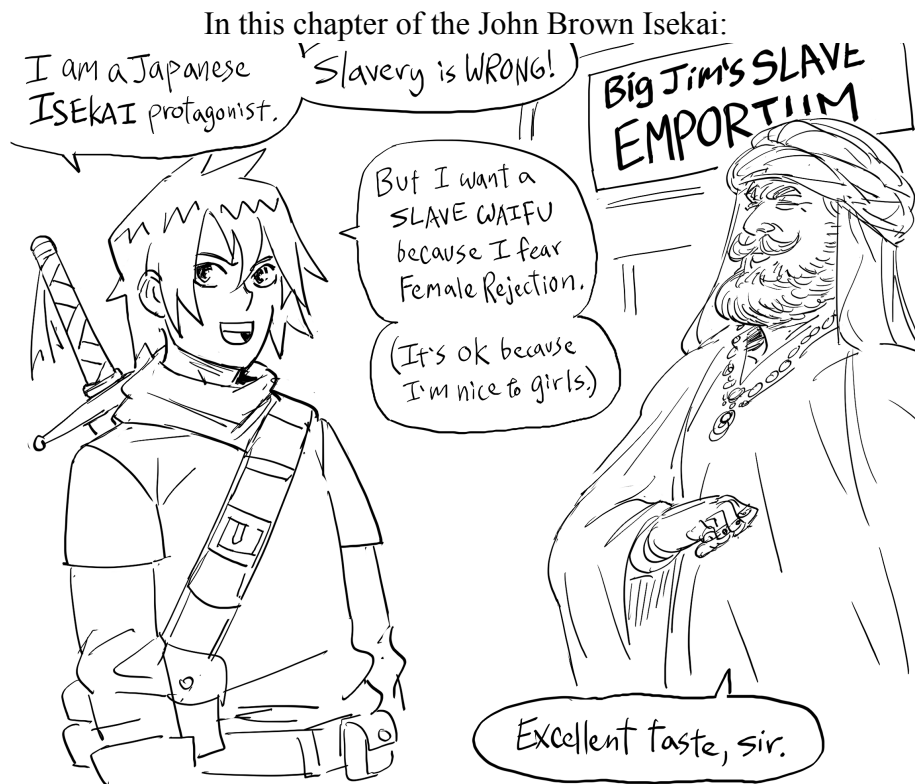
"Don't skedaddle just yet!" shouted Brown. Seeing that she had no intention to approach him, Brown threw the keys towards her as far as he could "Use these, young lady! Get those cuffs off!"

Kyauta paused for a second, leaning down to pick the keys as best as she could with her limited movement capability. She then continued her merry way away from Brown, not willing to take chances with the wild man from the mountains.

Brown didn't intend to give chase; it'd probably cause more misunderstandings if he did so. Plus, he had a whole corpse to dispose of now.

The old man had honestly hoped that he'd get a break in the afterlife, where he would finally reunite with all the family he had lost over the years, where Earthly sorrow and separation would end under the grace of the Almighty. Brown had already considered his mission done when he had sacrificed himself to become a martyr on Earth.

Yet, if Providence had prevented his death, if he had been raised again by the Heavenly Father, then he'd never stop or falter in his divinely ordained mission, not until he finally found himself in front of the Pearly Gates.



Disclaimer: I won't be posting a meme on every chapter like I did with the previous volumes of the John Brown Isekai. Finding 12 appropriate memes for 12 chapters was hard and time consuming, finding Brown-knows how many memes for every chapter of the novel-length edition would not be possible without me including low-quality memes.

([Original post](#) by [@baalbuddy](#))

Finally, I am very happy to present you the novel-length John Brown experience. Sorry for taking so long, I do unfortunately have IRL matters that I have to tend to. I've had to (and will have to) spend basically all of my free time either writing, drawing or editing these last two months to get these chapters ready in reasonable time. Still, I do enjoy writing, and seeing people enjoy the John Brown Isekai is enough. I hope you enjoy this crazy ride, I have some insane stuff planned for the future chapters. Cheers!

P.S.: The Gemeinplatz calendar (exemplified with the "68th of Winter, 5859" in the opening) is split into four seasons, each season is split into 9 decameron (a unit consisting of 10 days) meaning that every season has 90 days. One year in Gemeinplatz is 360 days.

P.P.S.: I also opened a subreddit, [r/JohnBrownIsekai](#), for the John Brown Isekai if you're interested in discussing this series with the 10 other people that are on there.

Chapter 3: Chapter II – His day is marching on!

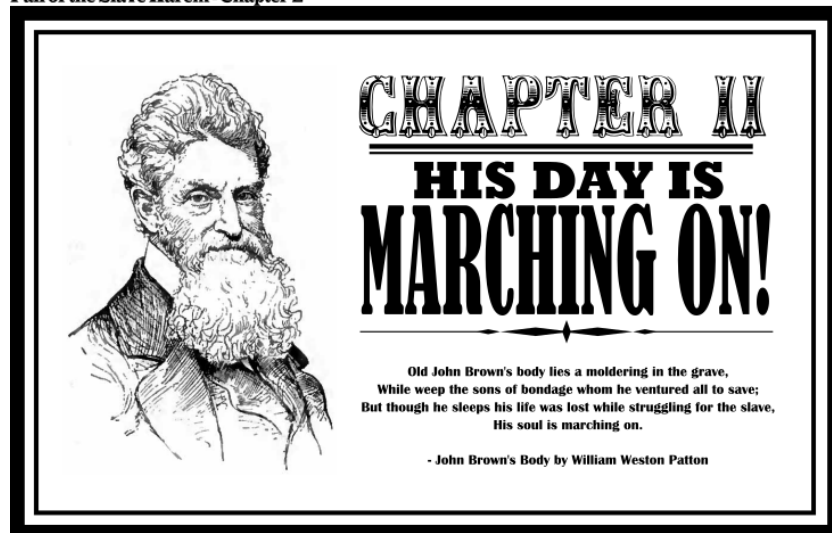
Obligatory Content Warning / Disclaimer (in general, for all of the John Brown Isekai): **This is the *John Brown* Isekai. This work deals with slavery and the horrible things it brings.**

While I've avoided writing anything in a gratuitous or a needlessly detailed manner (a.k.a. **everything is kept PG**), the following elements are and will be present in this story: **Slavery, xenophobia, fantasy racism and fantasy hate crimes. The author doesn't condone any of the aforementioned.** Writing a work about these things doesn't mean I support any of them, they are supposed to be bad things.

Another point: **The otherworlder / isekai'd characters in this work are meant to be exaggerated characters based on MCs from webnovels / light novels from their respective countries.** Those characters are *not* supposed to be representations of your average American, Korean, Chinese or Japanese person. I don't think that the Americans are dungeon-dwelling slavers, nor do I think that the Japanese are egoistic OP jerks. Nor do I think that the Chinese are ruthless sect masters, and I don't think that that the Koreans are materialistic capital-G Gamers.

I apologize if I came off as rude or condescending, I didn't meant to. It's hard to convey tone through text. I just wanted to make the above points as clear as possible since you cannot do custom content warnings on RoyalRoad. **I hope you enjoy reading the John Brown Isekai.**

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 2



2022 - The Cabbage Preacher



Here we see the generic slime monster in its natural habitat. It is quite a sight to behold. With its smooth, semi-transparent body containing blueish tinges that take on the color of the environment, it can camouflage itself and manage to survive in a variety of ecosystems.

The Gemeinplatz slime, a term referring to many species of slimes that are commonly grouped into one, is a distinct member of the protozoa. This unicellular organism can be easily seen with the naked eye unlike its microscopic cousins, commonly reaching the size of a fully ripe cabbage when fully developed. This odd creature is a very opportunistic omnivore, feeding itself with plants and carcasses whenever it can find them.

The blue Azdavay slime, one of the subspecies of Gemeinplatz slime, is currently in great danger. Its body is very fragile, making it a target for predators looking for easy sustenance. While the slime does travel in packs of three or more to defend itself against its enemies, it has found itself under increasing pressure by a new predator that has introduced itself to the environment.

This newcomer is an old member of the *Homo sapiens* who has found himself outside of his usual ecosystem. Like most members of his species, he has two arms, two legs, and two spears waiting to be thrown at his next meal. The human has spent the last day crafting these spears, sharpening wooden sticks with a knife looted from another human in hand.

The wild human lies in wait, patiently hiding behind a bush while he waits for a trio of slimes to unknowingly approach him. Slowly the slimes hop over to their doom, in ignorant bliss as they know not what is about to come at them.



Finding that the time is opportune, the human jumps out of the bushes, screaming to scare the slimes. The slimes' hesitation is what brings about their end; the big blue blobs freeze for a moment in fear. A moment is what a human needs. He throws one of his spears at the slime closest to him, killing it when its nucleus is pierced and destroyed by the spear.

The human isn't done just yet. He readies his second spear, this one piercing the other slime, the third one successfully running away.

Thus concludes the wild hunt of the human, two slimes left on the ground marking the results of today's hunt. He picks up the slimes by the spears still attached to them, muttering a prayer in thanks to a Lord that nobody in Gemeinplatz is aware of.

Nature is indeed wonderful, yet it is also unnecessarily cruel to slimes.



Old Brown was back in his old cave, having returned with a fresh harvest of two slimes. They have been his only source of food in these lonely mountains. He had seen no other soul since the slaver (whose body had long ago been eaten by wolves and slimes) and his slave.

It was quite a worrying situation, to say the least. While the local fauna had been easy to defeat up until now, Brown knew not what to do if he encountered something fiercer. Nor did he know how he'd survive if winter came by to visit again. Even worse, exiting the mountains might be more dangerous than staying in them. What were the people of this land like? For all he knew they might all be cannibals that'd eat Brown for breakfast.

John Brown had died 6 years before the what most would call the grandfather of isekai, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, was first published. He was quite uninformed on how to survive in another world.

Brown set aside troubling questions of survival for now though, he was sure that Providence would guide His faithful to safe shores one way or another. It was time for him to get occupied with making some of the good stuff.

Putting down the slimes, making sure that their liquid didn't spill out on to the floor, Brown took ahold of a steel helmet that he'd looted from his only visitor. Brown wasn't an uncivilized man; he wouldn't straight up scoop up some raw slime if he could help it, and help it he could. He took ahold of a flint and scraped it on the helmet's surface, using it as a makeshift firestarter, to create sparks to light up the kindling he had already prepared. This firestarter was then promptly promoted to a bowl that'd hold the slime's former innards. The blue fluid quickly began bubbling inside the bowl, emitting a smell that was a queer yet oddly satisfying (to someone as desperate as Brown at least) mixture of fat and sugar. This process of boiling the slime got rid of excess water and harmful germs (though Brown had also died before the Germ Theory of Disease was widely accepted, meaning that he didn't exactly know what he was accomplishing by doing this).

Brown now put aside this "solid blue stew" to allow it to cool down to a gelatin-like consistency, for it was easier and more civilized to eat something solid with your hands. He didn't remain idle though; for idleness was a tool of the Devil, he thought, and Brown wanted nothing to do with the Devil.

Thus, while his mind was wandering off in search for a way to relieve this sinful idleness, Brown stumbled upon an idea. He knew that people were present nearby to wherever he was. The steel helmet of the slaver showed to Brown that the humans nearby were civilized enough for metalworking (though apparently not civilized enough to have abolished slavery), meaning that they'd also be civilized enough to engage in trade and business. It'd be quite beneficial if Brown had some way of engaging in trade if and when he encountered human civilization. But what would the people here want to buy? He needed something that'd appeal to a market that he knew nothing about.

By now the fire in his cave had left a great pile of ash, one that Brown had no idea what to do with. Wood ash, slime liquid that smelled of fat, smelling... Eureka! At this moment Brown would have actually shouted "Eureka!" if he wasn't concerned about attracting unwanted attention.

Brown emptied the helmet, which now contained solid blue soup resembling the slimes it had been made from. He then began engaging in the making of consumer goods in another world.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

While Brown's day marched on, busy with his new commercial venture, so marched on the day of the inhabitants of the small town of Azdavay. The town was mostly visited by travelers as a stop between the copper mines of Curry and the grand dwarven city in Zon'Guldac. Azdavay had a highly developed service industry to thanks to these travelers going to and fro.

One individual of note to our tale was a certain demi-human named Ayomide, who toiled away in a corner maid café as a waitress. This establishment was run by an otherworlder that had the idea to bring the concept of a themed café over to Gemeinplatz. It had a small but loyal entourage of patrons.

"Welcome home master, I welcome you to La Isékai!" *May you all burn in the underworld you sons of asses.*

Not only was she working in the hellish service industry, she was *forced* to work in the service industry. As if dealing with the dregs of humanity (also known as 'customers') wasn't enough, she wasn't getting paid to put up with them.

"What do you want honorable master?" *'Honorable master' my arse!*

Her internal objections were for naught, for the gods had cursed this world with magic. She was directly controlled by the proprietor (or "master" as he fashioned himself) during business hours, her body moved with no volition of her own.

It was hell on not-Earth.

Ayomide sometimes wished that the proprietor's magic was better so that he could at least bother to wipe her capability for thought during working hours. At least she would suffer less that way.

"Here's your sweet brioche, master!" ...

Her propensity for silent insults would slowly give way to tired silence since she became more and apathetic as the day marched on. By the evening her head would be completely empty; her brain simply had nothing to process as she couldn't control herself.

Thus, the day marched on, and on, and on, as if it would never end.

“Please have a nice day master!” Ayomide and the rest of her fellow staff waved a stiff goodbye, with an even stiffer smile on their faces. Things quickly changed when the customer was seen outside. In a manner that’d be most uncanny if any outsiders observed it, all of the waitresses stopped smiling and waving in unison. They didn’t make any sound, no relieved sighs or humorous banter that’d mark the end of a normal business day, while they marched in an orderly manner to their quarters.



Their quarters were a cramped one, only containing the bare minimum needed to contain the dozen slaves. Bunk beds with only straw bedding, a bucket in the corner that constituted a latrine, a lack of windows making the air inside feel more than metaphorically suffocating... The slaves heard a ‘click’ from the lock of the steel door. The master always made sure to lock them in to keep them from escaping during the night.

The room was eerily silent after that.

The silence was broken with the sound of a dozen bodies collapsing. The magic controlling their bodies had stopped, it took a good few seconds on the ground for the slaves to remember how to control their own bodies. A couple silent expletives flew around in the air during this process, after that no other words were muttered from the tired slaves who immediately headed to bed. It was useless to strike conversation; they barely knew each other due to not being able to converse during work.

Tonight though, Ayomide didn’t plan to be asleep. She waited an hour to make sure that all her coworkers were sleeping before slowly moving her aching body towards an empty corner of the room to do her nightly training.

Silently she cast a few weak spells to warm up. “[Breeze], [Breeze], [Breeze]...” Her ginger hair waved ever so slightly at every cast. It was easy, even in her tired state, for her to cast such simple spells by speaking them out loud.

Such simple, vocal spellcasting wasn’t her goal though. *[Breeze]! [Breeze], godsdamnit!* Her hair stood still. She didn’t give up, silently shouting ‘[Breeze]’ deep into the night. Yet, her hair stood

still, no matter how many hopeless tears she shed, even as the birds outside began to chirp to welcome the coming morning.

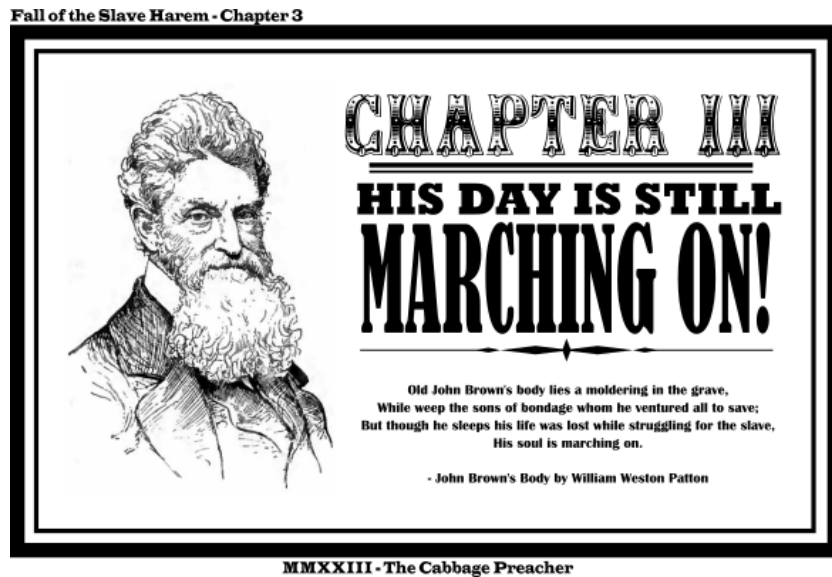
Ayomide heard the footsteps of the master slowly descending the stairs. Did she really want to welcome another captive day of having no control over her life? Was she to forever remain a disposable slave to a hellish corner café? Would she die yet another forgotten living corpse, comprising a simple, small cog in the monstrous slave economy of Gemeinplatz?

...N-No, I want to live! [Breeze]!

Suddenly she felt her hair move, a cool breeze embracing the back of her neck.

Ayomide had managed to cast a spell with only her thoughts.

Chapter 4: Chapter III – His day is still marching on!



A cold breeze rolled down the mountain, as it always tended to do, knocking over the odd particles of snow that were still falling. Spring was coming, yet the mountains of Curry stood ever so stubbornly, trying its best to preserve the grip of winter. The only signs of spring were the odd plants piercing the thin sheet of snow to reveal odd hues of green and yellow. The smell of wet earth carried by the fresh mountain breeze was quite pleasant, being the kind of smell that makes one feel alive.

It was quite a sight to behold, and behold Brown did. He, while waiting for his product to complete developing, had set off on a self-imposed mission to survey the mountains to see if there was any road to civilization. The old man oft found himself voluntarily stopping in his tracks to admire what he took to be the majesty of Creation, waxing poetically while doing so.

As for his observations, there weren't many signs of human civilization in his immediate area, other than the occasional abandoned mineshaft that had been abandoned and looted long ago. It seemed that only Brown had decided to settle down in this area. There was also an earthen path, the same one that he had seen the slaver on, that might (or might not) lead to human settlement. The forest that extended down from the mountains blocked him from seeing if there were any dwellings in the distance. He had decided that he'd head down there if he was left with no choice, the chance of being lost in a foreign forest was too high (especially as there were no familiar stars in the sky that could help him with navigation).

Brown stopped when he saw a small lake, made by centuries of snow melting and eroding the rock, that contained a small population of various fish. He wasn't hungry, so he felt content with watching the fish swim around the glistening, clear water.

That's when Brown realized he wasn't alone in watching the fish.



For what was afraid of had happened and old Brown's eyes had now met something fiercer: a black bear standing on only two legs, watching the water in search for fish. The bear was chewing on the dead carcass of an unfortunate slime as it waited for an opportune time to acquire much needed protein. From its standing position the beast looked almost human, a very hairy human that could easily end Brown's otherworldly adventures.

Brown was a brave man, brave enough to raid a federal armory with 22 people, but he was not foolish enough to think that he could defeat a bear by his lonesome. He silently moonwalked, in a manner that would seem comedic to him if he was not in a life-or-death situation, trying not to capture the attention of the bear that might think of him as an easier source of protein...

Crunch. His escape plans were ruined by an abominable twig that he couldn't properly see while moving backwards.

The bear stared at Brown.

Brown stared at the bear.

"Good morning, young man. I am just some old, dry meat you see; you have no need to-" His persuasion attempt failed, evident by the fact that the bear had begun running towards him in a manner that was shockingly fast for its enormous body.

Brown, in a desperate attempt to gain an advantage, threw his makeshift spears before legging it. One of the spears bounced off the bear's fur, sharpened wood was no match against skin as thick as it, while the other managed to find itself being lodged in the bear's soft nose. This unexpected addition to the beast's body stunned it for a bit, allowing Brown to acquire much needed distance from the bear while it growled with killing intent.

He began a brisk march towards the small cliff where his safe cave lay, with his furry 'friend' in tow. Brown was fast; the bear was faster. Every step meant a shorter distance between the two. It

was quite hard for Brown to maintain such speed, especially as the melting snow had made the ground quite unsuitable for this unexpected morning jog.

By the time Brown had reached the small cliff whose top housed his cave dwelling, the bear was so close that Brown could feel its crazed breathing make contact with his neck. Without taking a look back he began jumping to-and-fro towards the top of the cave when...

Thud. Brown found himself hitting the cold ground, backside-first. Now he made eye-contact with the bear, not for long as Brown had to do his best to quickly jump sideways to avoid the claws flying down to him. This pitiful jump wasn't enough as one of the claws found its way to his right shoulder, piercing through his coat as if it was made of toilet paper.

Brown didn't have any time to swear or deliver a one-liner to entertain the readers, his shoulder was now bleeding and he urgently had to make his way to the cave. He ignored the pain for now, standing up to again make way to the cave. This time he was successful, all that extra adrenaline came in handy. Thankfully the bear wasn't as agile, it could only growl and groan at Brown while watching him up on the cliff.

"Thank the Holy Spirit for guiding me away from that bear..." muttered Brown. He collapsed on the floor of the cave, his chest rising up and down in pain-laden exhaustion. He didn't have anything to stop his shoulder from bleeding any further. He could only pray and hope that the wound wasn't going to get infected.

Brown laid on the ground like so for about an hour, wanting to sleep but being unable to from his shoulder aching so dreadfully that he thought he was about to earn another one-way ticket to the Pearly Gates. After his rest he looked down from the cave to see, much to his horror, the bear patiently waiting down there. Around it were the emptied shells of the local slimes it had hunted during the hour. The bear seemed intent to set siege to its new mortal enemy.

"By the Lord, at least the bears in America weren't this patient." commented Brown in observance of his new rival. By now he had gotten used to the stinging pain in his shoulder.

Brown didn't know when or whether the bear would give up, so he returned back inside his cave to observe how his product had developed. Inside the cave were a dozen bars of blue soap, made from slime fat, solidified inside clay molds. It wasn't that hard to make simple soap; he only needed mix together some wood ash and fat. The molds had an odd shape: the sole of Brown's shoe. He had tried to make the molds into more of a brick shape at first, but it was hard to make something straight and proper without any tools to do so. Thus, inspiration had struck him when he accidentally stepped on a ball of clay, Brown had found out that his shoes were the best way to make consistent molds.

He took one of these molds containing soap and, in a fit of anger, threw it at the bear that was still frolicking down below. The mold hit the bear's thick skull, breaking the mold open and letting the soap go free on to the stone floor below. This move hadn't hurt the bear much, only serving to frustrate the beast even more.

Being besieged by some wild bear had left Brown in a sour mood. "Now, what am I going to do with you..."

“Welcome home master, I welcome you to La Isékai!” *May you all burn in the underworld you sons of swine.*

Another day meant another round of work for Ayomide. The same people, the same dishes, the same drudgery...

“What do you want honorable master?” *‘Honorable master’ my tail!*

Most days, as they contained nothing special, would go by very quickly for her. Today wasn’t such a day, quite the opposite, she hoped that today would develop to be a day of jubilee. Time showed its relativity as it slowed down to a torturous halt.

“Here’s your green *mochi*, master!” *May the mochi get stuck in your detestable throat.*

Thus, the day marched on, and on, and on, as if it would never end.

“Please have a nice day master!” *And let me have a nice day of my own.*

Ayomide and the rest of her fellow staff waved a stiff goodbye, with an even stiffer smile on their faces. Things quickly changed when the customer was seen outside, in a manner most uncanny, all of the waitresses stopped smiling and waving in unison. They didn’t make any sound, no relieved sighs or humorous banter that’d mark the end of a normal business day, while they marched in an orderly manner to their quarters. Ayomide was about to execute her plan before being rudely interrupted by the proprietor.

“Ayomide, my kitten, come here for a second.” *What?* She was surprised to see a break in the daily monotony. *He hasn’t noticed, has he?*

The proprietor was making a gesture with his finger that signaled Ayomide to come to him. He didn’t need to actually do this, as he was the one who was currently controlling her movement, but pretending that his slaves weren’t only doing his bidding out of mind-control magic felt better for the proprietor. From his dumb smile she understood that he hadn’t understood anything about her plans for today. Her body moved to stand next to the proprietor while her coworkers went for their quarters. The proprietor locked the door to the slave quarters, while humming a chipper tune that was quite foreign to anyone in Gemeinplatz.

Ayomide’s mind wasn’t sitting idle while all this was happening. *Painting on the wall, too inconvenient... That broom? Too far away. That leaves...*

The usual dumb smile of the proprietor, covering the entirety of his young, inexperienced face, was one that made Ayomide retch. “Let us have some fun, kitten. Come on, don’t be shy...”

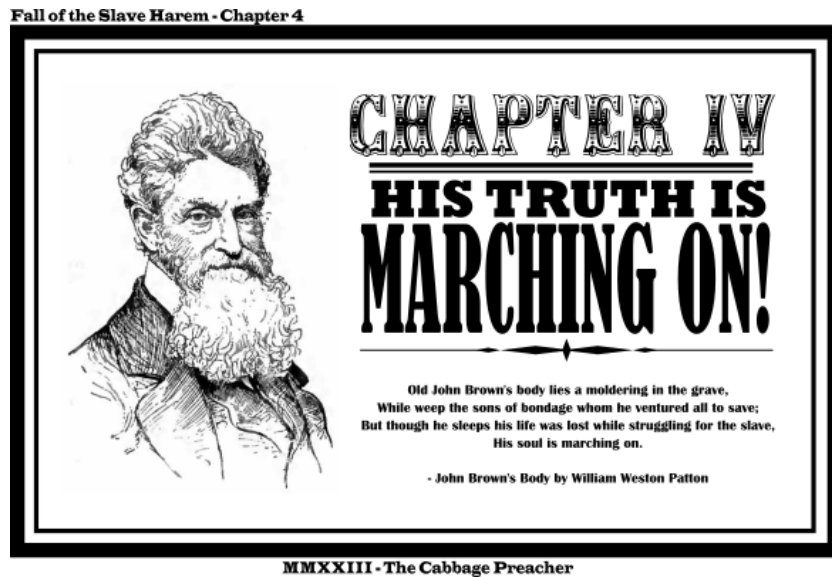
At this moment Ayomide was unable to control her speech (as usual), but she still controlled her thoughts. Today, her thoughts were of the dangerous kind. *[Dispel Magic: Body Control]!*

Ayomide felt relieved as she felt her muscles obey her again. took hold of the priceless porcelain vase that had caught her eye. Before the proprietor could notice that something was going wrong for him, the vase had made swift contact with the man’s face. It shattered into a thousand or so pieces, one large piece kindly lodging itself to the man’s left eye. The proprietor himself was shattered too after having found himself on the ground, left too stupefied to properly process what had just happened.

“You- You dirty, swarthy wench! You damned ni- Argh, I can’t see!” He was brewing up a storm, but none of the slaves inside their quarters were willing or able to help him.

Ayomide’s heart was racing, she had done it. There was definitely no turning back now. She didn’t have the time to be standing inside the café, it was likely that someone would soon come to investigate the ruckus. She barged out of the front door, running for dear liberty.

Chapter 5: Chapter IV – His truth is marching on!



Welcome, folks of all kinds and dimensions, to the Annual Curry Mountain Brawl!

From the top enters a new contender in this year's brawl, Mister John Brown from Connecticut! He has a special thing just prepared for this occasion folks, and he's ready to spice up this year's contest.

And standing at the bottom, staring at his rival standing at the small cliff, is Bipedal Bear! It is at quite a disadvantage, some of you might know, for it has picked the low ground for this fight. Yet this veteran of the mountains looks like it is not willing to give up its title this easily, it has besieged old Brown and is not intent on leaving.

The contestants are staring at each other, with killing intent the likes of which have never been seen before, looking to see who'll strike first. Brown seems to be holding a helmet containing a boiling mixture of highly concentrated lye.

What does he inte- oh my God, he's going straight for the eyes! Old Brown has gone for the forbidden "chemical warfare" technique, long banned by the Geneva Convention. Luckily for him Geneva is not a city in Gemeinplatz. He has poured the burning liquid down from the cliff to the head of the bear, blinding his opponent!

Chances aren't looking good for bipedal bear, folks. It seems to just be running around wildly, trying its best to strike at its opponent. Though, if Brown approaches, it could still be dangerous with its sharp claws, folks, so don't tune out just yet!

Old Brown seems to be planning to descend the cliff, perhaps looking to escape before the bipedal bear can notice him. Can he do it folks? Can this new contender in the brawl earn a place at the top, or will he become tonight's dinner?

...Wait a second, the bear is down, folks! It has slipped on a bar of soap that found its way to the battlefield! What an unfortunate accident, even Brown seems surprised at this predicament! I-It seems that the bear is not moving anymore. Is this the end of the road for the bear?

One, two, three...

...eight, nine, ten! That's a KO!

What an unexpected twist, folks! This year's champion of the Annual Curry Mountain Brawl is John Brown!

★ FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM ★

Adventurers, the people that most stories about another world focus on. They are adventurous, brave folk who'll stop at nothing to throw their lives on the line for fame and glory. From their ranks rise heroes, fiends, and everything in between. They protect the common folk; they slay monsters that threaten the realm... Those would be the words that a layman would use to describe adventurers.

A cramped room, a floor dirtied with unspeakable substances, and a mass of unwashed, rowdy folk. Those would be the words that'd describe the adventurers of Azdavay, or the adventurers of any far-away town for that matter.



There in a dank room sat a group of three around a round table, drinking and smoking their hard-earned money away. Their sense of fashion resembled a Renaissance Fair where no one knew how medieval people dressed. Among the most atrocious of their crimes against fashion were the random bits of metal plate, none of these plates in a place that'd protect anywhere vital, stuck throughout their body. None of them wore a helmet in a bid to show off their overly pompous hair. In short, the most important thing for adventurers wasn't practicality or survivability. The most important thing was looking cool while doing their job.

The conversation around the table was a dull one, consisting of bits and bobs about the adventurers' adventures and other drudgeries.

“Shinasi, it’s been getting harder and harder to find mountain slimes nowadays.” began an older adventurer, chewing on some tobacco that had been imported from the east. He had a giant scar that travelled from the bottom to the top of his head, most assumed that this scar must have been earned in honorable and glorious battle. In fact, he had earned this scar when he had dueled another adventurer in an argument about what portion of the loot they got to keep. “I always end up finding useless slime corpses instead. Business has been drying up lately.”

“You don’t say Shakir!” replied a younger man, with great sarcasm in his voice. He had an assortment of scars too, righteously earned when he was travelling through the treacherous realms of his thorn-infested backyard. The only piece of armor he wore was a small steel plate over his heart that was fastened by two belts, the rest of his hairy chest was bare (thankfully he was wearing pants). He was slurping on some cheap wine as he spoke. “It’s obviously the man-bears waking up from hibernating. They’ll calm down in a week or two.”

“He’s probably right. Believe me, those things are vicious.” added the only woman in the group. Shakira’s lack of sensible clothing could only be matched by Shinasi. “You know, that Vadanabe Ceneriko, or whatever he was called, I bet he was eaten by a man-bear.”

Shakir grumpily grumbled at the thought of his ‘comrade’ who he hadn’t seen for a while. “Such a shame too! That boy had one of those ‘cheat skill’ things. And he had a slave to boot!” He shook his head, chewing his tobacco even more intensely. “Such a shame, such a shame...”

Shinasi shrugged. “Eh, plenty of otherworlders end up in the mountains. We’ll probably get a new one coming here eventually.” He chuckled and then added “If they survive.”

Their conversation was cut short by someone entering the Adventurer’s Guild building; there was a bell hung to the door that made it easy to hear guests. “Here comes an otherworlder now.” said Shakira, watching a familiar figure enter the room. This figure was a young male *Awmereighkan*, quite a common species of otherworlder, who had been staying in Azdavay for around a year or so. He usually gave them easy yet well-paying quests to gather some ingredients. The adventurers were quite fond of him because of that.

Today though, unlike his usual calm self, the *Awmereighkan* seemed to be quite disturbed. He quickly walked up to the counter where the guild’s receptionist lay, barking something in broken Low Gemeinplatzish.

Shakir tilted his head, trying to get a good view through the crowd in the guild. “Young man has got one of his eyes covered with bandages. What happened?” He received his answer as the receptionist rung the bell on her desk, signaling an emergency quest.

“Hear ye, gather ye!” This announcement from the receptionist caused great excitement among adventurers. Emergency quests tended to be profitable, after all.

“Adventurers of this guild! Sir Jacob Smith of Florida has informed us of a great emergency! Please- please no pushing, stand in even rows as I relate to you the contents of your quest!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Tonight was a beautiful night like any other. Moonlight shimmered on to puddles of water, snow no longer being in sight as spring banished the last vestiges of winter. Flowers, hardly seen in the moonlight, sprung forth to welcome the new season. A catgirl was running from slavery, trying her best keep herself under the cover of darkness.

The last few days had been hellish for Ayomide. Her old master wasn't the type to just lay down and accept losing a significantly valuable piece of 'property'. The damnable adventurers over at the guild had been hunting her down, keeping her on the run. She hadn't been able to catch a wink, or anything to drink. Her muscles, doing their best to keep her upright during the chase, ached like they were ripping apart from their seams. It didn't help that the mountains she had escaped to were still cold; the revealing maid outfit from the café did nothing to protect one from Mother Nature.

Ayomide could easily see in the dark, like others of her kind, but she had slowly started to lose focus and clarity in her sight as the night marched on. Suddenly, she tripped on a log that she hadn't paid attention to in her wild run.

She found herself laid flat on the ground, the wet ground making her feel even colder than before. Struggle as she may, Ayomide was unable lift herself up anymore.

This is it...

Her vision fading, Ayomide found herself smiling during what might be the last moments of her admittedly short life. At least she was dying a free woman. That's what mattered in the end, Ayomide thought.

...suck it, Jacob...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Brown woke up along with the first rays of sunshine visiting his cave. He groaned in pain when he felt his back aching like he had been on the rack for the entire night. The old man had been forced to sleep on the floor of the cave for a few weeks now; the spine of someone entering his sixties didn't react well to having to spend the entire night laying on stone. Brown heard some concerning crackles come from his poor spine as he straightened himself.

"*Yawn...* thank our Heavenly Father above for keeping me alive for another day. *Ow, ow*, Lord help me, *ow...*" Brown winced once more as he tried to get up, his right arm being of no use. The wound that the bear inflicted had gotten awfully discolored. He was afraid that it might be infected; having to amputate his own arm was definitely not going to be fun if that was the case.

Finally managing to rise and shine after ten minutes, Brown made his way out of the cave to acquire food for the day. He'd have smelled the wet earth and the fresh smell of the blooming flowers if he hadn't placed the bear's hide next to the entrance. Brown and his father before had been tanners; it wouldn't have been proper to let good hide waste away. The hide, stretched on a makeshift rack made of stray logs, smelled awful as it was covered in animal dung. Brown hadn't covered the hide in dung just for the fun of it; covering leather in dung was what helped it soften up (thanks to the bacteria found in the dung, unbeknownst to Brown). He planned today to begin tanning the leather using the tannin he had gathered from the logs of pine trees from the forest below.

Thus, old Brown jumped down from the small cliff leading to his cave, only to have his morning routine be interrupted by an unexpected visitor.

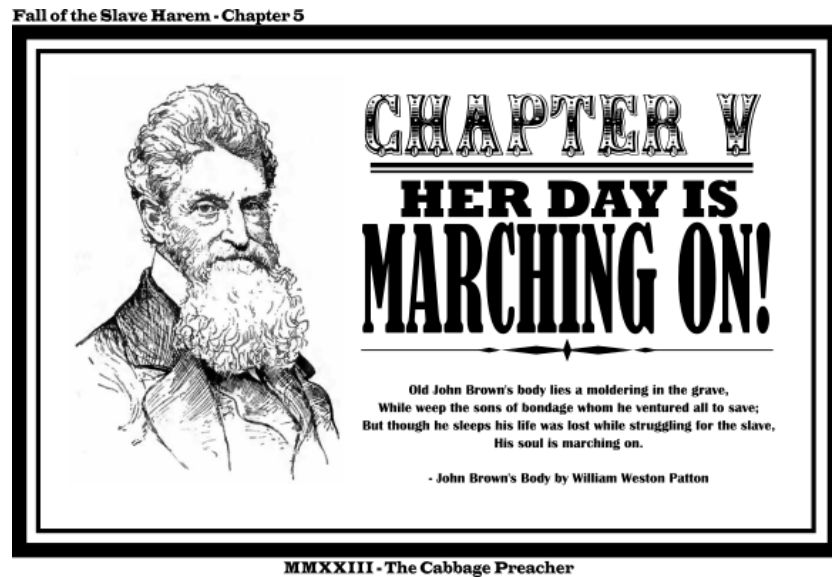
"Miss, are you okay? Oh Lord..." Brown rushed to greet his visitor.

On the ground lay a woman of particularly short stature, unmoving as if she were a corpse. Her dress had been dirtied and torn greatly; Brown had to avert his gaze while approaching her to avoid

seeing anything indecent. Her face was as dirty as her clothes, beneath a layer of dirt and grime lay black skin with a slight tinge of crimson. Her hair was ginger, barely noticeable beneath a layer of mud, standing in stark contrast to her dark skin.

Brown crouched to get a better view of her and was relieved when he saw that his visitor was still breathing, even if only barely managing to do so. He used his uninjured arm to drag the young woman out of the mud, covering her with his coat so that she wouldn't be exposed anymore to the elements. Then he rushed back to his cave to quickly find something for her to eat and drink, his mind in a state of great worry about the wellbeing of his guest.

Chapter 6: Chapter V - Her day is marching on!



...this place smells like shit. I thought that the Otherworld wouldn't be so stinky.

Ayomide opened her eyes. She could only see the wide blue sky in this position; she felt as if she was floating. This illusion of floating disappeared when Ayomide noticed that she was still laying on the ground. She quickly raised her head up to see, much to her surprise, that she was still in the same spot as last night. The only difference was the she was now blanketed in fur that smelled... unpleasant, to be polite.

“Alright, what is going on here? Anyone?” The mountains seemed to be as abandoned as they normally are. This didn't help explain how she was currently alive. *Did some wandering mountain deity save me?* She looked around again, no mountain deities or spirits to be found in her local area.

Everything was calm. Too calm, in fact. Ayomide felt a tad bit scared as the wind howled by.

“Good morning young lady I-”

Ayomide shrieked and jumped back in shock. She quickly turned her head around to find a wild man that towered over her. He was quite a scary sight with his messy hair flying around in the wind, with a face that hadn't been washed in an entire month. She calculated that only an insane man would probably decide these mountains as his habitat and Ayomide mentally prepared herself accordingly for a wild encounter.

The old man was more nonplussed compared to Ayomide. He hadn't expected to hear such a shriek. “Ex-excuse me for having startled you, I approached you silently as to not wake you up.” An awkward silence filled the air as both paused. “My name is John Brown, young lady, what is yours?”

“Ayo... Ayomide.”

“Right, Miss Ayomide, is it? Are you able to get up?” Brown extended his hand towards Ayomide. Struggle as she may, Ayomide found herself unable to get up even with Brown's help. “Well, thank

the Lord that you're alive at the least. Just wait a minute, I'll bring something to eat." The old man then left the premises, running back to his cave.

The lord? These mountains don't seem like a suitable place for any lord, thought Ayomide. Unless this man has gone crazy and thinks himself as lord of these mountains. Still, the old man seemed cordial enough.

Brown quickly returned with a crude clay bowl that was filled with solidified slime of some description, along with a clay cup filled with murky water. He had been spending some of his idle time making earthenware; eating out of some dead man's helmet felt too macabre for Brown. Plus, he needed somewhere suitable for storing bear meat and earthenware pots were the best that he had for the job. It wasn't too hard to find clay and fire it up in a pit. Someone inexperienced in pottery like Brown could learn how to make useful items with some experimentation.



"Sorry young lady, but our household currently lacks spoons. You'll have to make do with eating using your bare hands." said Brown as he handed the bowl and cup over to Ayomide. She blankly stared at the bowl for a second or two before realizing that it contained *something* that was edible. Ayomide also remembered that she hadn't eaten anything proper for a week or two. These two realizations combined, she quickly chowed down the slimy goop in record time. The goop had mixed with the unglazed clay to create an awful wet mixture of earth and sugar; it felt like the best meal Ayomide ever had in her life. She was shedding tears of joy by the time she finished the bowl.

Brown was watching Ayomide in a concerned manner. "Are you okay, young lady? Are you in need of anything?"

"No- No, I'm fine sir. Thank you for saving my life." said Ayomide as she wiped her tears.

The old man smiled warmly in response. "No need to thank me. Thank the merciful Holy Spirit for guiding you to safety, young lady."

Ayomide tilted her head, confused due to Brown's ramblings that seemed odd to her. "The holey spirit?" *How would a being in charge of holes lead me to safety?*

Brown shook his head and furrowed his brows. "No, no. The *Holy* Spirit."

“The howlin’ spirit?” *Something to do with wolves or dogs?*

“No, I-” blurted John Brown. He heaved a deep sigh. This probably wasn’t the right time for evangelism, but Brown was a stubborn man. “So, there’s the Lord, right?”

Ayomide nodded her head. “Yeah, you were talking about him earlier. Haven’t seen him yet though. Is there really a lord in this mountain?”

“Think beyond the mountains, for the Lord is everywhere!” Brown pointed to a faraway point in the sky while making this point.

Ayomide followed where Brown had pointed in hopes of seeing this lord. She only saw a few clouds lazily gliding in the sky. “Everywhere? If this lord is everywhere then why isn’t he here?” *Maybe he cast an invisibility spell?*

Brown clung on to his patience. “No, don’t think of a simple lord! I’m talking about *the* Lord, the one who cannot be compared to any other mortal lords of this realm! King of Kings, our Maker!”

A lord that cannot be compared to another lord... Wait, it can’t be! “Are you talking about the emperor?”

“No I’m not... I don’t recognize any emperor, young lady.” Brown gave up on his impromptu catechism session. The people of this land seemed to lack understanding of such topics, or so he thought. “Christ almighty help us...”

“Kreist...” Brown’s mention of a certain carpenter intrigued Ayomide. “Right, I’ve heard of that name. That damnable proprietor would shout this Kreist’s name, something like ‘cheese us goddamn Kreist’, every time he got frustrated with something.” She looked happy to have finally understood something that came out of the old man’s mouth. “I still don’t get why he kept requesting cheese though...” *And this old man is requesting help from Kreist. Wonder who he is.*

Brown, in opposite to Ayomide, was quite shocked at the casual blasphemy that Ayomide was relating. Putting ‘damn’ and ‘Christ’ together was much more serious of an insult according to a devout 19th century man like Brown. “What an uncouth proprietor! How condemnable! That heathen!” He crossed his arms and shook his head in great disapproval.

Ayomide was surprised to see the overt reaction of Brown to what she thought was a weird interjection. “Being uncouth was the least bad thing about that man, believe you me. The whole locking us in some dark room every night...” She audibly shuddered. Everything felt surreal to her, as if her entire life up to now had been a bad dream.

Brown had been wondering up to now as to why he had found Ayomide up in the mountains; the conversation had finally shifted in a way that was suitable for him to ask such hard questions. “And I’m assuming that’s why you’ve made an escape and found yourself here?”

Thus, like water freeing itself from a broken dam, Ayomide’s emotions flowed free along a torrent of tears. She told Brown of her life that had begun in some cramped barrack, of her countless equally damnable owners, and of her life during her escape. She hadn’t been able to properly talk to someone else for years, by the end Ayomide felt greatly relieved as she had never done before. To see something other than contempt, pity or apathy; being treated as a person felt strange yet great. Liberty tasted thus to someone who had never even seen a glimpse of it.

“...now I don’t know what to do, old man. I can’t return to town and I don’t think I’ll be able to return to anywhere with other people. Being free is such a hard thing.” Ayomide was smiling while she said that. *I know what to do. I’ll have some proper sleep, no more waking up in the morning for me!*

“I’m not in the position to dictate what you’ll do, young lady. Nobody, other than the Lord, is in a position to dictate what someone else does. ‘A man’s heart deviseth his way: but the Lord directeth his steps.’, remember that young lady.” Brown had been waiting for the right time to ask Ayomide this question. “I will aid you to the fullest extent I can if you do decide to leave here and go on your own. But, if you wish to stay here, then I hope that you’ll assist me in my divine mission.”

A divine mission? This old man really likes to make over-the-top remarks. “What’d your mission be, old man? What has the, whatchamacallit, this holy spirit of yours inspired you to do?”

Brown stood up, and posed himself as if he was speaking to a crowd. He seemed excited at the prospect of getting to speak about his mission. “Our divinely ordained mission and obligation is to fight for the Lord and wipe out all that profanes His Creation.” Ayomide tilted her head, showing that she had no idea what Brown was talking about. Brown continued his speech with great fervor nonetheless. “That which is the greatest act of profanity against the laws of the Almighty is slavery, which throughout its entire existence has been none other than the most barbarous, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of one portion of citizens against another portion, the only conditions of which are perpetual imprisonment and hopeless servitude, or absolute extermination.”

Ayomide could easily understand the second half of the speech. *I can actually understand him when he’s not talking about spirits and whatnot...* She had saved her own tail; many tails were left unsaved in this realm. She could hop on a boat and escape to a realm that didn’t practice slavery, but thinking that thousands of her brothers and sisters would lay in captivity disturbed Ayomide greatly. Fighting an entire system of slavery wasn’t safe, still, had Ayomide chased after liberty for the sake of a modicum of ‘safety’? *People are going to be hunting me down no matter what, might as well go down fighting.*

“I understand, old man.” Ayomide extended her left hand towards Brown. “This is how you make an agreement in Awmereighka, right? With a handshake and whatnot.” She had observed him throughout their conversation; the fact that he wasn’t from this world was clear as day, especially to someone who had interacted with many an otherworlder. *He seems to not be a prick at the least, a surprising thing for an otherworlder.*

Brown was left flabbergasted for a second. He smiled before extending his right hand in kind. “The Lord has given you an eye that is most keen, young lady.”

“You don’t need a keen eye to see the obvious, old man.” The pair shook hands, signaling the beginning of camaraderie that’d change Gemeinplatz forever.

As their hands separated, Ayomide noticed that Brown had winced in pain when they shook their hands. “Is your arm injured, old man?”

“Yes, young lady, a bear slashed my shoulder while I was fighting it.” He rolled up the sleeve of his coat to reveal his shoulder that had gotten discolored. The wound was oozing with substances that need not be mentioned.

“That looks awful... Wait a second, stand still.” Brown was surprised as Ayomide grabbed his arm and did her best to slide closer (she still couldn’t stand up) to Brown. “What was that word again...

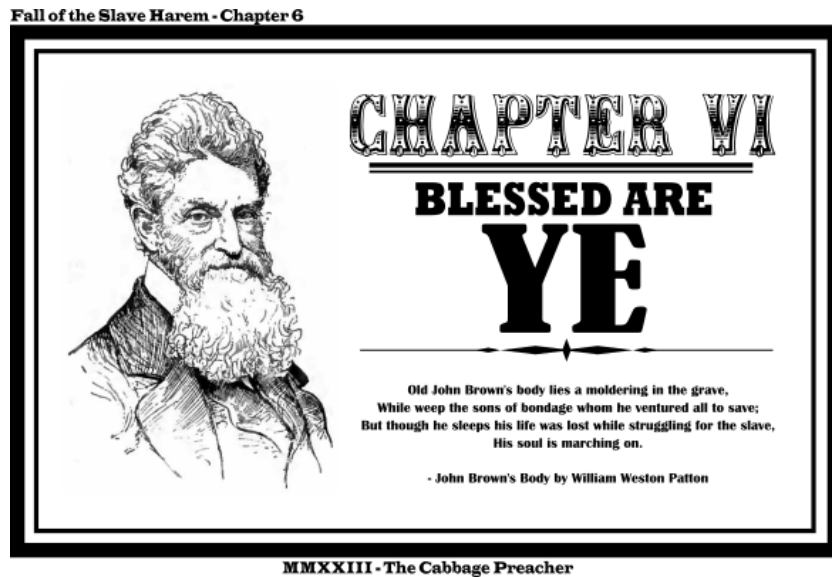
This- Disin... [Disinfect]!” Brown was beyond surprised, and left utterly speechless as all the aforementioned awful ooze and discoloration slowly disappeared. He stared at his arm eyes wide open and slack-jawed, left in disbelief. Ayomide collapsed as her muscles gave in; magically disinfecting such an infected wound wasn’t exactly easy on the body.

Incoherent noises came out of Brown’s mouth while he tried to process what had occurred before him. His ability to speak properly finally returned after a few minutes. “Ah... Wha... It’s... It’s a miracle from the Holy Spirit! Bless our Heavenly Father above, praise be to our lord and savior Jesus Christ! Hallelujah!” He continued showering praises upon God while prancing, tears rolling down his cheeks due to feeling overwhelmed with hallowed joy.

Ayomide was still collapsed on the ground; all of her energy had been drained in one spell. She felt the effects of ‘mana fatigue’ as it was commonly called. Her eyelids lazily closed themselves, begging her to fall asleep again.

Eh, I’ll let the old man think whatever he wants.

Chapter 7: Chapter VI – Blessed are ye.



Nothing so charms the American people as personal bravery.
- John Brown, addressing the League of Gileadites

47th of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

Mount Curry, and the rest of Casamonu, had enjoyed a lucky period of respite from snow or rain. Yet, as spring came in full force, endless rain was now on the menu once more. The soil, already muddy from melting snow, now became marshlike up in the treeless mountains. Those who are sane would avoid travel during these times to avoid being soaked in water and covered in mud. The already deserted mountain path had become even more deserted, except for a few less-than-sane adventurers looking for easy prey.

“Damn the mud...” murmured Shinasi as he slowly marched on the path with his adventuring comrades. “We should’ve gone out the moment this quest dropped, instead of waiting like idiots.” He and his comrades were wearing slightly more sensible clothing while outdoors. They all wore a thick piece of gambeson, to protect from both injury and cold, along with less sensible random bits of metal strewn throughout their bodies that provided minimal protection but maximum fashion. They carried their helmets in their bags, for the creed of the adventurer decreed that showing your hair and face off was more important than always protecting your noggin.

“You were the ones who told us to wait until the man-bears calmed down, you idiot.” replied Shakira. She held the flat side her ridiculously enormous two-handed sword up on her head, using it as a makeshift umbrella. Shinasi was doing a similar thing with his shield. Shakir, the oldest and wisest of the bunch, had simply cast a magical shield over his head.

“It’s your fault for listening to me then!” Shinasi half-seriously continued complaining like so while Shakira replied and Shakir listened. There wasn’t really anything else that they could do to pass the time while on the road.

Fog began obscuring their vision and the air got colder and colder as they got up higher and higher on the mountain. Nevertheless, the brave adventurers marched on for the noble cause of ‘getting that dosh’. Sir Jacob had put a good price for finding and bringing back his lost slave.

All this walking made Shinasi quite hungry. Thankfully, he spotted some juicy pear-shaped berries on the side of the road. He reached for them, only to be interrupted by the flat side of Shakira’s enormous sword slamming his back.

“What the Otherworld was that for?!” screamed Shinasi as he rubbed his aching back. “There are enough berries for all of us, no need to get jealous!”

“These are poisonous you bloody idiot!” Shakir took one of the berries to show it clearly to Shinasi. “These are the ‘death’s crown’ that sprout in the rainy season. You might not have seen them due to being a winesop who’s afraid of mud dirtying their precious boots.”

“It’s called ‘being an oenophile’, not ‘being a winesop’!” Shinasi grumbled in mild annoyance at being unable to have a snack. He turned around from the bush, and met with a nondescriptly small cliff. What was non-nondescript about the cliff was a tall, humanoid shadow that stood over it. This shadow seemed to be watching them from beyond the fog.

“Weird shadow watching over us to my front, to single-file battle formation!” whispered Shinasi as to not alert their enigmatic observer. The adventurers, now in serious business mode, quickly entered their usual battle position. Shinasi was at the front doing tank duty, holding a shield and spear. Shakira was next to her with her enormously large sword ready to cleave anything down. Shakir took out his staff and retreated to the back. From there he began his usual analysis of their enemy.

“Considering our altitude and the size of the beast, I estimate that we’re most likely encountering an ogre, sasquatch or a cyclops. All three of these beasts should be peaceful as long as they are not hungry. Let us retreat, not breaking visual contact, while exercising caution.” Shakir’s range of vocabulary seemed vast only when he was in combat mode. Heeding his words, the trio slowly walked backwards in formation.

Suddenly the beast behind the fog shouted at them. “Greetings travelers, you need not to retreat! I bear no ill will towards you!” The adventurers’ retreat stopped. They looked at each other, trying to decide what to do. “Come here and rest good sirs, there is a cave here that’ll shelter you from the rain!” Shinasi hesitated, before he broke formation and began walking towards the shadowy figure.

“Shinasi, what’re you thinking?! Maybe he’s a mimic of some sort, don’t go near strange people without thinking!” protested Shakira.

Shakir shook his head. “No, mimics don’t dwell outside of dungeons. I don’t know any monsters that dwell in these mountains that have the capability for proper human speech.” He stepped forward to join Shinasi. “It’s just one man, we can easily beat him up if he tries anything strange.”

Shakira wanted to respond with “What if he’s a skilled wizard or cultivator?”, but she gave up upon realizing that her team members wouldn’t listen out of a desire to rest. She joined them in scaling the small cliff. Reaching on top, they found an old man standing in front of a brightly lit cave.

“Welcome to my humble little abode, travelers. My name is John Brown, and your names are?” Brown seemed excited at the prospect of getting to meet the people of this land. “Please, enter before you get soaked any further.”

The trio gave their names as they entered the cave at the behest of this odd hermit. There was a fire burning in the middle with a helmet being used as a makeshift bowl. Scattered on the edges was a bear's pelt, a small mountain of blue soap bars and some crude earthenware.

"Excuse me if the food is meagre, I wasn't expecting to receive any guests with this kind of weather." Brown scooped up some cooked slime from the helmet and distributed it evenly among his guests. He also took one bowl for himself, leaving some spare in the helmet.

Shakira and Shinasi were staring at Shakir, who had to step up in situations that involved suspicious strangers handing out free food. *[Check Poison]*... He waited for a few seconds before an answer beamed into his head. *Nothing*. He nodded at his teammates to indicate that the slime stew was safe to eat.

The trio attacked at the food as if it was a monster, forgetting to thank him or Him for providing them their meal. Brown had to content himself with staring at them with a disapproving look; he had to put up with some uncouth people if he wanted to get any information as to his whereabouts. Ayomide hadn't been useful in this regard, especially as she had not been awake since Brown's arm had miraculously recovered.

Brown pushed aside thoughts of chiding the adventurers. He had business to conduct. "Well then, good travelers, where do you hail from?"

"We've come to these mountains from Azdavay, looking to complete our quest." Shakir had taken up the job of answering Brown's queries. "Apparently, a fugitive slave was last seen travelling in these mountains. We're here on the orders of the Adventurer's Guild of Casamonu to apprehend them if possible." Shakir took out a small piece of paper from his pocket. "'Short darkskin female demi-human with ginger hair. Bad tempered and prone to violent outbursts.' Have you seen anyone that matches this description?"

Brown shook his head "No, I haven't seen anyone here for the last few weeks." He was acting more cautiously since he now knew that he was dealing with bounty hunters of some sort. "I think they'd be dead by now if they escaped alone to these mountains in this weather."

"Right..." Shakir sighed in disappointment. *This whole quest has been a huge waste of time. It'd be better if we just returned to Azdavay.* "We'll take our leave, then. Thank you for your cooperation." The adventurers sat up, intending to leave. They were curious about who Brown was and what he was doing, but they were not curious enough to waste their time talking to some hermit.

Brown had one last question for the adventurers. "Before you leave, could you please help an old man and point me to where this Azdaweigh is?"

"You just need to go straight down the mountain path, Azdavay is right on the path." Shakir pointed in the general direction of Azdavay while speaking. "You probably shouldn't travel alone, though. The forest isn't too dangerous since it's close to town, but some of the creatures there can be quite a problem if they knock you out."

Brown nodded his head and gave a simple farewell. "Right, thank you. Safe travels to you then." He watched as the adventurers left the cave one by one, leaving Brown in his lonesome.

After confirming that the adventurers were not in sight, Brown quickly poured the leftover solid blue soup from the helmet to a bowl. He rushed over, bowl in hand, toward the inconspicuous bear

hide that lay in the corner of the cave. The old man pulled the bear hide aside to reveal Ayomide, who was awake much to Brown's surprise.

"Young lady, you've awoken?" He handed the bowl over to Ayomide. "I thought you were never waking up after the... the miracle happened."

Ayomide lazily yawned while she slowly got up. She didn't seem too bothered by the situation. "Good morning..." It was night "...It's just a bit of mana fatigue, old man. Nothing too serious."

"Nothing too serious? You've been sleeping for a week, young lady!" Brown was nonplussed at the plussed state of Ayomide.

"I needed some good sleep, that's all." She yawned again. Ayomide was looking much healthier compared to the first time Brown had seen her. She had a relaxed smile on her face as she stood up to stretch her legs. "Thank you for not letting those adventurers get me."

"Thank the Lord, young lady, for your hasty re... covery?!" Brown's words slowly lost their way when he noticed something odd with Ayomide. He hadn't noticed this since Ayomide had been covered by a bear's pelt all this time, but she seemed to have a long, furry object that was wagging on her back. "Young lady, if it isn't discourteous of me to ask, what is that odd object behind you?"

"This?" Ayomide turned her back to Brown. "It's called a tail. Did you not have tails in Awmereighka? All the otherworlders I've met were always obsessed the tails of catgirls..." She pointed towards the tail as it wagged to-and-fro. "Also, here are my ears, if you've never seen one either." she added sarcastically as she pointed toward the two catlike ears, which Brown had thought were unruly tufts of hair up until now, that stood atop her head.

Old John Brown had expected to encounter slavery. He had expected to encounter crimes against humanity. He had *not* expected to encounter a catgirl.

"What hath God wrought..."

Chapter 8: Interlude – A day in the (after)life of John Brown.

“Young lady... Ayomide! Wake up!” Brown’s voice reverberated like so in a particular cave in Mount Curry.

Ayomide, sleeping under the bear pelt gave her usual response. “Mmh... Give me five minutes... or five hours.”

“As a wise man once said, young lady: Early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise.”

“But I’m not a man...”

“That doesn’t matter, does it? Come on, get up young lady.”

Ayomide seemed sufficiently convinced by Brown’s words: After a round of yawning and stretching she finally got up to greet the new day. Thus concluded Brown’s daily ritual of getting Ayomide to wake up.

Next came breakfast, which usually constituted of some form of cooked slime and nothing else. Lacking knowledge of the local flora, especially as to what might or might not be poisonous, the duo had decided against trying to vary their diet by foraging for now. Brown hadn’t participated in hunting (being against hunting for sport) so he lacked the know-how that’d allow them to have the option of eating meat. One saving grace was that with the coming of spring some birds had laid their eggs, meaning that they at least had a source of protein for the current season.

“Mmm... worth it to climb all those trees.” commented Ayomide as she took a bite out of a boiled egg (made by putting eggs in a water-filled helmet and boiling them). It was pretty bland without any salt or other seasoning, but it tasted (mostly on a psychological level) much better compared to anything else she had during captivity.

“Praise the Lord for providing us with eggs on this very fine day...” Brown muttered a prayer before taking a bite of his own.

With the conclusion of breakfast came time for the main event of the day: labor. While the slimes of the mountains and the endless rain did provide them with a stockpile of food and water that was more than enough, Brown quite disliked idleness and saw it as a state to be avoided. Ayomide didn’t particularly care about being idle, but she didn’t mind working on projects that’d improve their quality of life either. Hence, they found themselves busy with one thing or another every day.

Brown had mostly busied himself with making pottery; he really wanted to travel to Azdavay to advance his plan of abolition but couldn’t due to the potential dangers of the forest. The endless rain had made it nigh impossible to properly fire anything as Brown didn’t have a kiln; he had been making firing pits (which was as simple as piling some wood and burning them) to make his pottery. Brown tried making a kiln out of mud, but his makeshift design (made with his occasional observance of modern kilns in 19th-century America) had either cracked while firing or straight up failed to fire anything. The duo still spent some of their time shaping clay and preparing earthenware for firing, mostly as a recreational activity. It was fun to sit around together and shape some clay while chatting.

Brown and Ayomide, if running out of food, frequently ventured outside to hunt slimes and gather firewood. Brown had gotten used to throwing his makeshift spears. Ayomide wasn't well-versed in combat magic, so she joined Brown in hurling spears around. She'd climb up trees to launch a surprise attack on slimes, or gather eggs from nests. Slime leftover from their hunting trips would be made into soap, Brown planned to sell these whenever he could finally reach Azdavay. They had built up a small mountain of blue soap in the cave over the last month.

The day's work ended as the sky darkened. While Ayomide's eyes could easily see in the dark, Brown's couldn't. With no sources of lighting other than the moon and the fire lighting in the cave, Brown (and Ayomide) had to retreat inside. They had dinner, comprised of eggs and slime. The duo would sit around the campfire, chatting the night away until they were tired. Brown usually told Ayomide about his life back in America along with biblical stories. She in turn talked about her life up to now, though in all honesty, most of her experiences were a blend of bleak and bland that weren't that interesting to tell or listen to. Frequently being under mind control (or, in Brown's own words, 'the spell of the Devil') didn't leave space for forming memories of one's own. Still, talking about her past was a form of therapy that Ayomide needed desperately in her life.

While Brown and Ayomide were spending time around the fire, they took care to heat water in the helmet. When it began getting late, they took turns (Brown going outside while Ayomide was bathing, or vice versa) taking a 'bath' using the aforementioned hot water along with using some soap of their own manufacture. Cleanliness was next to godliness after all, so Brown made sure to never neglect bathing daily even under their current circumstances.

With the end of bathing so came the end of the day. Ayomide tucked herself under the bear pelt, while Brown had to content himself with using his coat as cover.

Thus ended a normal day in Mount Curry...

Chapter 9: Interlude – A sermon in the (after)life of Jacob Smith.

Back on Earth, Jacob hadn't been a common attendant of his local church. He thought that churches in Florida were too 'woke', so he preferred spending his time on Sunday by ranting online about how Western civilization was collapsing or whatever.

However, things had changed when he had found himself on Gemeinplatz. The Temple of the Divine here was, according to Jacob, a fine establishment that had no problems speaking the truth. No censorship, no mobs, just pure, unaltered free speech coursing throughout the halls of the temple.

He still found the priests boring, and by the Divine were they boring, and he still dreaded having to sit on embroidered pillows during the sermon. Even the wooden pews were better, at least he could sit on them. But no, the people of Gemeinplatz sat down, legs crossed, while they listened to whatever some old git had cooked up for the day. Still, he had to endure it, going to the temple regularly allowed him to cultivate a more positive image amongst the people of Azdavay.

The temple was a cubic structure made of fine stone brick, with a wooden dome on top of it doing its best to reach the heavens. There was also a tower, part of the temple, that housed a bell used as a call for prayer. Regular glass windows adorned the building protected by iron bars; actual stained glass was too expensive for some backwater town like Azdavay.

Crowds of people streamed in and out of the temple every noon of the fifth day, to gather for prayer. Jacob, of course, was amongst the crowd going in, this going-in crowd being mostly comprised of people with skin lighter than white bread. It'd be untoward to keep their fellow Believer in bondage; slaves weren't given any religious education. Their inferior brains couldn't reach the Divine properly, or so mainstream doctrine went.

The crowd passed a few salutes toward Jacob, some even bowed to the otherworlder among them. This crowd was all-male, as women and men were separated in prayer. This felt somewhat odd, even to a man like Jacob. The rest of Gemeinplatz, while inequal in many ways in that regard, was mostly not separated by gender. He had seen adventuresses, businesswomen, even the occasional lady in their own right. It was as if the temple had stayed a few centuries behind, with all-male priests, and strict segregation of the sexes in their places of worship.

Inside the temple was a whole another sight. The floor was covered with a grand carpet showing even greater embroidery, the dome shone light through it that gave a hallow aura, and the stand of the priest stood tall over the flock. The walls and the ceiling were covered in various geometric shapes and patterns, this particular temple was controlled by a more conservative, Iconoclast sect. Most of the temples in Northern and Eastern Gemeinplatz were.

Jacob found himself a seat in the front row, not that he was pious, but because he wanted to be in front. Unfortunately, this meant that he had to endure the droning speech of the priest.

The temples in Gemeinplatz saw themselves as a place of enlightenment, so they always made sure to drag an old priest to impart some wisdom before noon prayer. Jacob was astonished as to how they made such a corpse of a man walk, maybe they dabbled in some necromancy to get him walking. "...and, good gentlemen, this is why we have to make sure to stick to the Divine Path: be ye kind, gentle, and forgiving in your conduct toward fellow believers. So says the Divine, praise

be to Its name.” The priest heaved a cough, doing his best to read a piece of paper he was holding. This old sack of bones needed notes when he wasn’t reciting scripture. “On to a terrifying incident that has just befallen our community, one that I believe we should take as a warning for how things will be if we stray from the Divine Path. A case of a fugitive slave has been brought up…”

Jacob perked his ears upon the mention of a fugitive slave. He was slightly annoyed that his personal problems had somehow leaked to the ears of the priest, but this was no surprise. Clergymen were often intertwined in their local community after all, it wasn’t too odd for a priest to have heard about Jacob’s case from some people in the Adventurer’s Guild.

“Now, let us not forget this one simple truth: we must always make sure not to stray from the Divine Path. Let us not forget of the tribes and peoples that the Divine, praise be to Its name, condemned when they dared, with endless impudence, rebelled against Its law and word. Despite what some heretics may say, in complete blindness to The Hallow Word, slavery is a natural part of this world’s order. Being against what’s sanctioned by scripture rebellion against The Hallow Word, the Divine (praise be to Its name), Its Prophet (praise be to His name), and society itself, not to mention that abetting fugitives is a crime against the rights of your fellow Believer. One who does so is no different from a thief, equally damned in the eyes of the Divine, praise be to Its name.” The priest’s eyes directly locked with Jacob. “May the Divine, praise be to Its name, keep sending Its messengers to guide us through these tumultuous times.”

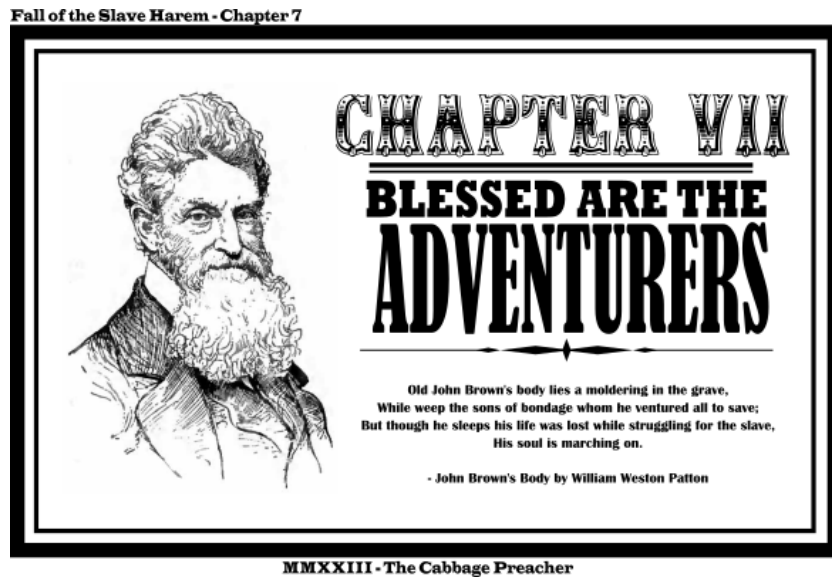
The priest looked like he intended to give further sermon, but the chime of the bell interrupted him. It was time to pray. “Praise be to Its name.” The priest put down his notes, preparing himself for prayer, which was conducted in a language that was long dead in Gemeinplatz. Jacob himself didn’t know what words he said while he was praying, so he mostly just moved his mouth around to look as if he was participating.

The prayer was conducted by the priest, with the flock following him. They sat up from their pillows, raised their hands toward the sky in unison while the priest chanted the prayer out loud for the crowd’s convenience. Then their heads went toward their stomach, then up again, then they prostrated... Jacob shut off his mind while going through this procedure. He was sure that everyone did. This wasn’t really anything dissimilar to how he had felt in church.

“Amen.” With this the flock ended their ‘hallow gymnastics routine’, this was the closest word that Jacob had to describe the experience.

He went out of the temple with the rest of the others, back to the café where Jacob would continue his Divinely sanctioned job.

Chapter 10: Chapter VII – Blessed are the adventurers.



58th of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

The eternal rain suddenly came to a close in Casamonu as if God himself got tired of the constant downpour. The mountain bloomed once again with life as the temperatures returned to a milder state. It was still cold, especially up in the mountains, but not cold enough to freeze one to death.

Brown woke up, seeing the sun shining through the clouds for the first time in weeks. The ground had mostly dried up, making it suitable for travel. It was time.

“Young lady... Ayomide! Wake up!” Brown softly shook Ayomide, who laid on the other side of the cave. She was fast asleep under the bear pelt, as usual.

Ayomide mumbled some semi-coherent words as she tried to resist waking up. “Mmh... Give me ten minutes... or ten hours.”

“As a wise man once said, young lady: The early bird gets the worm.”

“But I’m not a bird...”

“That doesn’t matter, does it? Come on, get up young lady, the sun’s already shining.”

“No, it hasn’t been shining for- Yes it is shining. Huh.” Ayomide turned around to meet the sun.

“Alright, give me a sec...” She yawned and stretched her arms before rising up from the pelt. The two had breakfast, consisting of cooked slime and boiled bird eggs, while they also discussed their plans for the day.

“So, young lady, Providence has granted us with clear skies today.” Ayomide cringed slightly at Brown’s overly grandiose form of speech “Thus, I’d say that it is time for us to begin my journey to Azdavay.”

Ayomide raised an eyebrow. ‘My?’ “Am I not travelling with you, old man?”

Brown stated the obvious “I don’t think it’d be a good idea for the young lady to go nearby to the town she escaped from.”

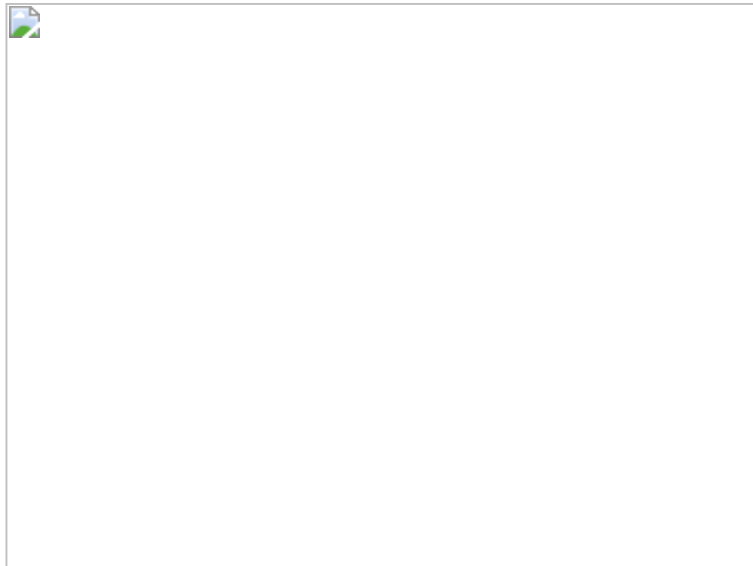
Right, there is that aspect to that. But... “Didn’t the adventurers say that travelling by your lonesome through the forest is a bad idea? I could just not enter the town itself while you do the shopping and whatnot.”

Brown closed his eyes to think for a second. “Hmm... It’s your choice, young lady. I can’t and won’t force you to take or not take such a risk. I’ll be fine with our Heavenly Father watching over us.”

If he watched over you so much then why did you end up being executed? “We’re comrades-in-arms, right?” *Even though we haven’t had done much... or any fighting.* “It simply wouldn’t do if you were to end up being mauled by some weird forest creature.” Ayomide considered herself somewhat lucky due to not having met such a fate.

“Then, young lady, it is decided. We shall set off together to Azdavay.” Brown looked to be pleased at Ayomide’s decision. Comrades were not dime-a-dozen, especially in these mountains most foreign to him. “Let us get ready for our journey!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



The forest of Azdavay, along with the forests of the rest of Casamonu and the northern part of Gemeinplatz, were famous for its vastness. Various forms of deciduous, broad-leaved trees covered the landscape as if they were part of an endless green ocean. Most famous of these trees were the tilia trees and their fruit, whom the locals would often dry to make tilia tea, and chestnuts that were always a welcome addition to one’s diet during winter. Yet, the ones currently visiting the forest were definitely not concerned with any of the aforementioned.

“Why do forests have to have so many bugs!” Shinasi groaned as he swung his spear wildly, in a futile attempt to drive off the flies that had come out in the dry weather.

“You know, flies usually buzz around food that’s left around. Maybe they wouldn’t be a problem if you weren’t a milksop.” replied Shakira. She confidently carried her enormous sword on her shoulder, not openly bothered by the flies.

“Am I a milksop or a winesop?! By the Otherworld, at least be consistent!”

Conversation in the forest that surrounded Azdavay went thus. Mud and heat had made the land like heaven for flies looking for easy prey, and foolish adventurers were falling for the flies’ trap.

Their bickering was brought to an end by Shakir. “Ssh! Calm down young’uns, there’s somebody up on the road.” The adventurers suddenly assumed professionalism, stopping their bickering and brandishing their weapons. The adventurer’s code stated that one must look cool at all times, and they made sure to abide them.

The figure on the road waved his hand in greeting. “Greetings, fellow travelers!”

“It’s the mountain hermit again.” Shinasi kept cool as Brown approached the adventurer group. The old man was carrying two makeshift spears on one hand while carrying a large clay jar with the other.

Shakir took the job of doing the greeting. “What a coincidence, Mister Brown. What brings you to this road?”

“I was heading down to Azdavay to sell my soap.” Brown pointed at the clay jar that he was carrying. “Your group seems to be heading back as well, I’d be honored to accompany you to Azdavay.”

The adventurers looked at each other in a displeased fashion. Adventurers weren’t wont to providing protection for free. “Well, you see... Uhm...” Shakir began cooking up some excuse to refuse Brown.

Brown understood what they wanted from the look on their faces. “I’m willing to provide you a cut of the profits if you guard me.”

The tone of the adventurers quickly shifted “Gladly sir, we’ll provide our protection!” Shakir smiled as he signaled his comrades to continue their march. *Getting a bonus is always nice, innit.* With negotiations out of the way, the group of four was free to march on to Azdavay.

Half an hour passed, and the quartet marched on without incident.

Shinasi stretched his arms and yawned. *I’m bored. There’s nothing attacking me other than flies-* He stopped this train of thought; it was bad luck to internally and / or externally monologue about things being peaceful.

“What the- [Lightning Missiaagh!” Shakir was suddenly snatched by a green, plant-like tentacle before he could counter it. The remaining trio quickly turned around to meet the source hiding behind the trees: an odd monster that looked like the lovechild of a tulip and an onion. Its body, as tall as Brown, consisted of a bulb that resembled a blue onion crowned with a red tulip-like flower on top. Several ‘tentacles’, four of them in fact, extended from the bottom of its body with one of them currently holding Shakir.

“What hath God wrought upon this realm...” Brown quickly tossed his jar of soap aside and readied his spears for throwing. Before he could draw first blood however, Shakira rushed with her sufficiently enormous sword to cut the overgrown vegetable. The veggie calmly responded by wrapping her sword with tentacles, blocking her from swinging it.

“Accursed vegetable! Go back to the cutting board where you belong!” Try as she may, Shakira was unable to regain control of her weapon.

“Shakira! This guy’s one of those weaponnapper, we won’t get very far with our weapons!” As if to prove Shinasi’s point, the weaponnapper nabbed his spear.

Shakir was being swung around by the weaponnapper, his body upside-down. The tentacles were wringing him like a wet towel, a scene that’d be the source of fanservice if he wasn’t an old man. “I’ll get him, [Lightning Misspuwah!” He was instantly knocked out by the monster knocking him into a tree.



Brown took a step back to think, before being struck with an idea. He picked up one of his bars of soap from the ground and threw the bar at the monster. The monster caught the bar of soap like any other weapon, as planned so far.

All four of the weaponnapper’s tentacles were now busy holding something. Brown took his spears and threw them in quick succession. His skills at the spear had greatly improved in the two months he had been in Gemeinplatz; one of the spears landed on the tentacle holding Shakir while the other hit the beast right in the bulb. Shakir landed on the ground with a grand thud, being no help as he was still knocked out.

Unfortunately for Brown his spears didn’t seem to be too effective. The weaponnapper used its newly freed tentacle to grab the human who had assailed it. Brown was now left incapacitated by the tentacles surrounding and slowly strangling him. A pious evangelical like John Brown couldn’t Hail Mary out of this sticky situation. He could only pray for some sort of intervention, whether it be divine or profane (though, according to Brown’s fatalistic point of view, any sort of intervention could be considered ‘divine’) mattered not.

Suddenly a figure clad in bear’s pelt jumped out from behind the trees. “Leave the old man alone, you stinky onion!” Ayomide had been trailing behind Brown ever since they had encountered the

adventurers. She had intended to keep herself hidden from the adventurers, however, this was no time for stealth.

Ayomide rushed forward to meet the weaponnapper, with one of Brown's makeshift spears in hand. The monster didn't do anything as releasing any of its arms would mean potentially releasing a weapon that could harm it (its simple brain couldn't comprehend the fact that soap is usually not a deadly weapon).

Ayomide was now ten feet (three meters) away from the monster. "[Breeze]!" She threw the spear at the monster's bulb and, unlike Brown's last futile attempt, used wind magic to increase its velocity. The spear went in with unnatural speed, piercing through the weaponnappers bulb and coming out from the other side to end up lodged in a nearby tree. The monster's tentacles dropped to the floor, freeing Brown and everyone's weapons. It seemed to move no more.

"Who the..." blurted Shinasi. His (and the other adventurers) questions were left unanswered as Ayomide ran away as fast as she ran in. Brown assumed a mildly surprised expression too, as if he had never seen Ayomide in his life. The adventurers stared at each other and Brown in shock while they tried to process what just happened.

"All's well that ends well." commented Brown after sufficiently having thanked the Lord for His intervention.

Shakir was the first of the adventurers to recover. "Right... Right, all is well. Shakira, could you use that sword of yours to peel that flowery part of the weaponnapper?"

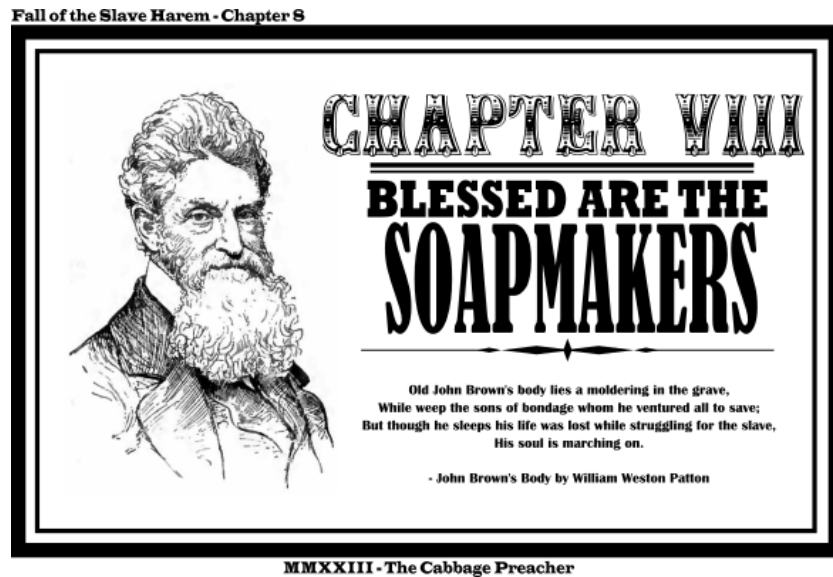
Shakira obliged, cutting open the 'tulip' to reveal a bunch of giant seeds packed inside, along with a glowing semi-solid orb of what looked like nectar.

"Think that this will sell for some money?" commented Shinasi upon observance of their loot.

Shakir smirked and rubbed his hands together in reply. "Will it sell? Of course, it will!" Weaponnapper seeds and nectar were an upper-class delicacy that, while not being too uncommon, still sold for a decent sum. There was more than that they could carry; every seed was as big as a head of cabbage. Everyone, including Brown, took two seeds for themselves, the adventurers leaving the rest in hopes that they'd grow to be more weaponnappers to profit off of. The adventurers stored the nectar in their water flasks. They were close enough to town that they wouldn't need to drink more water anyways.

With the looting done, the quartet reorganized once again to continue their march on Azdavay...

Chapter 11: Chapter VIII – Blessed are the soapmakers.



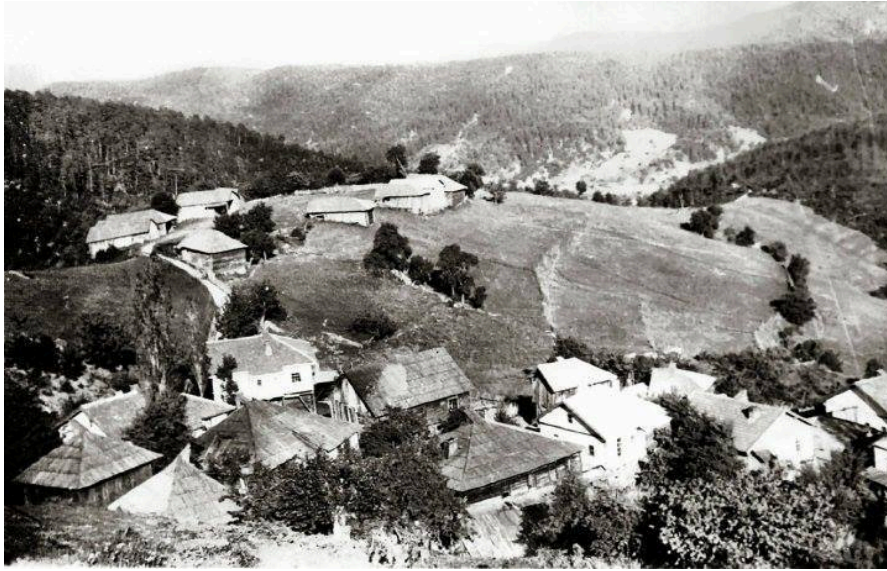
Fields and paddies of wheat, barley, rice, lentils and potatoes lined up alongside Tilia Stream showing hints of impending human civilization. The wheat on the fields was still green; it'd be around a month before the peasants would get to work reaping what they had sown. Unlike the wheat fields, the potato fields were filled with your usual mix of oxen, donkeys and bipedal, dinosaur-like creatures pulling ploughs to unearth potatoes. Brown was happy to see that the crops of this realm were mostly ordinary, things would've been hard for him (in the culinary sense) if they were sowing cabbages or anything similarly odd. Another point of note for Brown was the occasional laborer wearing metal cuffs: They were the chattel slaves working in the fields alongside the peasants.



Along the road were also small groups of peasants on break, it was simply impossible to keep laboring the whole day much to the chagrin of their lords, chatting away and cooking meals on metal pots. Some of their peasant acquaintances greeted the adventurers in passing, the sneaky and generous kinds handing the adventurers a potato or two as a gift. It was a good for them to keep on

good terms with the adventurers, lest the glorified mercenaries decide that they'd rather stop killing the monsters outside their villages.

Slowly the earthen path became one of gravel and stone, and the town of Azdavay appeared in the distance, marked by a roadside sign that read (in Low Gemeinplatzian, misspelt English, terrible Chinese transcription, somewhat decent Japanese and Korean all written side-by-side) something like "AZDAVAY". Of course, Brown could only read the English transcription on the sign, which was written as "ΛSOΛUΛV".



It was only at this moment that Brown realized that he hadn't been speaking English with other people all this time, he hadn't noticed since one usually didn't instantly and magically acquire a foreign language. He didn't ponder on it for too long; this was clearly just divine intervention helping him not get too lost.

The first that Brown noticed about the town was its palisades, comprised of 3 feet (1 meter) tall wooden posts supported by a base of fired clay bricks and earth. A few guards paced to-and-fro behind the palisades, keeping on lookout for anything unsavory. The palisade was cut off by a small gate, about two men wide, manned by two guards watching people as they went in and out the town. Their duties included halting people to make them pay a toll for entering the town; the adventurers (and Brown, on virtue of being with them) would pass with no problem thanks to being exempt from tolls, as the guild would pay for them. The guards recognized the trio and nodded to show that they could indeed pass.

Brown passed through the gate, meeting with a Gemeinplatzian town for the first time. The town was of a decent size, containing around a thousand residents along with a sizable population of passersby. Most of the buildings were constructed out of wood from the forest surrounding the town, while the middle and upper-class dwellings were made of clay brick and concrete.

In terms of its inhabitants, the people of Azdavay had a sense of fashion that was in line with the rest of Gemeinplatz. Doublets and hoses were aplenty, along with gowns and kirtles. Chaperons, hats ranging from wide-brimmed to no-brimmed, fezzes and fancy turbans sat on top of the heads of the citizenry. These were not all, however, for influence from otherworlders had also greatly influenced fashion. An odd mishmash of modern Western clothing, suits, jeans, frilly cravats and maid outfits along with an equally odd mishmash of Eastern clothing, *qipao*, *kimono* and *hanbok*, were also worn.



Brown followed the adventurers to the Adventurer's Guild building that stood next to town square. The town square also functioned as a marketplace; the whole square was covered by a grand roof, under this roof lay various stalls. The craftsmen of Azdavay, mostly comprised of potters, coppersmiths and masons, inhabited the buildings around this square.

It was already nighttime by the time the group had reached the town. The adventurers invited him to stay with them; Brown accepted their offer. The adventurer's all presented their personal badges, made of bronze, to a guard next to the guild buildings entrance. Brown was able to enter with them, despite obviously lacking any badge, thanks to the wonderful power of nepotism.

Brown's nose was suddenly assaulted by a coalition of booze, sweat, and other undesirable smells upon entering the building. The people of the guild had already gotten into a 'merry' mood that Brown frankly wanted no part of.

Brown excused himself. "I'll be hitting the hay, travelers."

"Ah, wait a second Mr. Brown." Shakir stopped Brown from leaving. "Don't sleep before cashing in your loot: some adventurers have a tendency to steal from others."

"Cash in my loot?" Brown suddenly remembered the two giant seeds he was still carrying in his pocket. "Right, thank you for reminding me. Where would I go about cashing these in?"

Shakir pointed to a small line in front of a desk that sat in the corner of the building. There was a small queue in front of it, which Brown joined along with Shakir's group in lining up.

"Next! Come on, no arguing about prices, it's all standardized. Shush now." The receptionist, who was a middle-aged woman that seemed to be done with life, called out to her next customer. Brown had finally reached his goal, after ten minutes of queuing. He gave his seeds to the receptionist, who quickly flipped the pages of a notebook containing prices set by the guild.

"Four libra fifty groschen." She took out five coins, four of them made of iron surrounded by a thin ring of electrum and one of them made of copper surrounded by a ring of iron, and handed it over to Brown.

“Mr. Brown, that soap is made from slime, right?” Shakir, standing next in line to Brown, was referring to the jar of soap that Brown was still carrying. “You can sell it to the guild as well, since it’s a product made from monsters.”

Brown handed over his jar of soap to the receptionist. She took out all the soap, five bars in total, and weighed them down on a scale that sat on her desk. “One libra fifty groschen.”

“Could you give me that amount as three 50 groschen coins, miss?” Brown received three coins, and he gave one to each member of Shakir’s party as payment per his promise. He asked them where their lodgings were, and bid farewell to the group so that he could finally get a good night’s sleep after around ten hours of travel.

Brown’s room was in the third floor of the building. It was a cramped room for twenty, shared by visiting adventurers, with beds made of straw resting on the floor. It was far more luxurious compared to sleeping on the cave floor, and Brown thanked the Lord for providing him with such suitable accommodation. He hit the hay, literally and figuratively, and finally had a nice night’s sleep.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Ayomide was staying the forest just outside of Azdavay, and was currently trying to catch some sleep. She couldn’t light a fire, thankfully the bear pelt gifted by Brown was enough to keep her from freezing.

Her attempt at sleeping was suddenly interrupted when she heard footsteps heading her direction. Ayomide quickly jumped up, readied a spear, and slowly began walking away from the direction where the footsteps were coming from.

Suddenly the footsteps stopped. Ayomide tried looking around her, she could clearly see everything at night thanks to having night vision, to no avail. There seemed to be nothing. *Perhaps I’m just imagining things...*

“You’re an inexperienced one.” Ayomide found cold steel, in the form of a knife, standing a hair away from her neck. *Gulp.* She quickly turned her neck around to meet her unexpected guest. This guest was a woman slightly older and much taller than her, with a black hood that covered her face. Ayomide could tell from the woman’s hand, currently busy holding the knife, that she had black skin.

Ayomide wasn’t exactly sure what to do in this situation. “So, uhh... Hello? I- I don’t think I have any quarrel with you...”

“Me neither, sister.” The woman drew the knife back and freed Ayomide. “Just wanted to make sure you wouldn’t impale me with that spear of yours.”

Yeah, I would’ve probably impaled her in shock if she approached from the front... Wait, sister? “You’re my sister? We look nothing alike.” *Nor are we the same species, Miss Human.*

The hooded woman shrugged. “Aren’t we all sisters in the struggle for liberty?” She opened her hood, revealing her face and curled black hair. “Sorry for startling you, I’m... I guess there’s no problem in giving my name to a sister. I’m Kyauta. Happy to meet you.”

“And I’m sorry for almost impaling you, I’m Ayomide. Pleased to meet you.” Ayomide smiled; she was happy to have a conversation partner that wasn’t an old white man from 19th-century America. Brown was a good man, no doubt, but he and her being from another world made communication awkward. Plus, you could only talk so much to the same person for two months. “So, why are you ‘round these parts? I don’t think anyone of the sane sort would be here at such a time.”

“I could ask you the same thing. Being around towns and cities isn’t a good idea for us, sister. Have you newly escaped from this town, perchance?”

“No, I’ve been free for... Well, I haven’t checked the exact date, but I should’ve escaped around the end of Winter. There’s this old hermit in a cave, name’s John Brown, that I’ve been living with. He’s of the odd, Awmereighkan otherworlder sort.” Ayomide stopped there, at the point where Kyauta seemed most intrigued. “So, I’ve given you my reason. What’s yours?”

“Sorry, I can’t elaborate too much in case you get captured, sister. It’d be trouble if they got you to talk.” Kyauta shook her head. “I’ll just tell you that I’m here to help Miss Moses’ exodus.”

Moses, exodus... Right, that’s one of the stories Brown told me. “Wait, Miss Moses? Isn’t Moses a man? Plus, I’m pretty sure he’s supposed to be living in Kanein with the Juice and whatnot, he’s definitely not in Casamonu...”

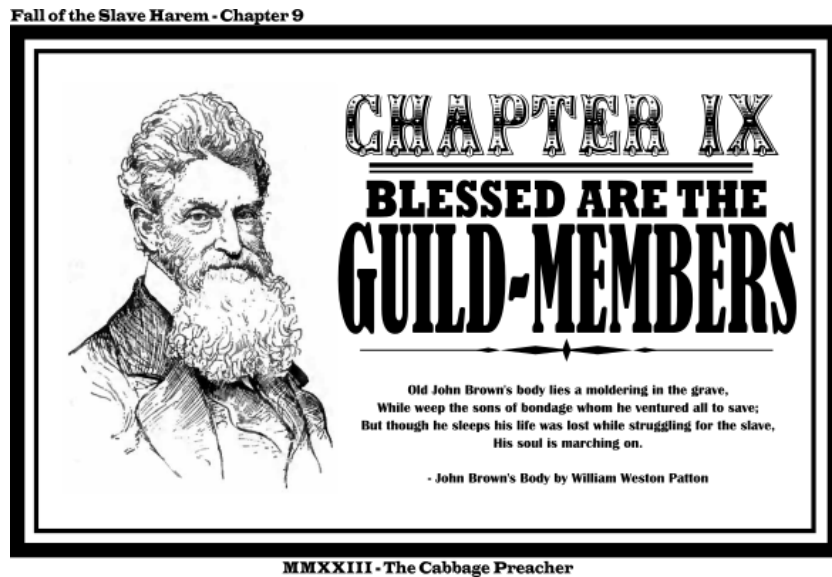
“You don’t need to concern yourself with who Moses is for now, sister.” Kyauta went silent on that topic, to indicate that she won’t elaborate further.

“Right, good luck on your mission then... Sister.” *Wonder why she wanted to converse with me... Maybe she’s trying to gather intelligence?*

“Thank you, may the Lord be with you. I’ll have to go now to fulfil my mission. See you, sister.” Kyauta closed her hood, and left as quickly as she came.

Ayomide yawned as she got back on her bear pelt. It was getting late; she couldn’t resist the temptations of sleep...

Chapter 12: Chapter IX – Blessed are the guild-members.



“Oh, Mr. Brown? You’re awake.” Shakir had found Brown sitting alone on a stool that sat far away in the corner of the guild building. It was still early in the morning, so early that the sun hadn’t even come out in fact.

“You know, us old folk can’t get much sleep.” Brown had been spending these early hours in prayer while waiting for everyone else to wake up. He planned to go out to the market, to see if there was anything that could help him and Ayomide, once the hour was more suitable.

“You’ve got that right. I haven’t had proper sleep in like, what, ten-twenty years? Not to mention the horrible back pain. *Sigh*. Oh, how time flies by...” They were having the idlest of conversation, the sort that only old men would be able to have.

“I’m surprised that you’re doing, as far as I’ve been able to tell, such a dangerous job at this age, Mister Shakir.” Brown didn’t fully comprehend what these adventurers were doing, but he had understood that it had something to do with hunting weird beasts akin to the giant onion he saw in the forest.

“Well, you know, I do think that sometimes. But the Adventurer’s Guild the only real way some commoner like me can make a living outside of working the fields.” Shakir took a look at Brown, scanning him. “You’re an otherworlder, right? From Awmereighka. I can tell from your name. Why don’t you join us in adventure? Most otherworlders advance quickly through the ranks with the cheat skills they get when they die.”

“Cheat skill?” Brown stroked his beard with his hand as he thought of what ‘cheat skill’ he could have. “Well, if I do say so myself, I have skills in tanning, herding sheep, grading wool, surveying land and marksmanship, not anything I’d call a ‘cheat skill’ by any means. I’ve all acquired those skills through years of honest work, not through cheating God forbid.”

“Still, your skills in combat aren’t bad. Especially that move of yours with the bar of soap, it was pretty clever. I think we would work as a quartet pretty well.” Shakir extended his hand forward,

meaning to shake the hand of Brown. *Having an otherworlder in our party would certainly increase our prestige.*

Brown refused to shake the man's hand. "Thank you for the offer, Mr. Shakir, but I'd rather earn my living through honest labor, like tanning and herding, not through being a bounty hunter. Our Maker rewards hard and honest work, you see."

Shakir looked puzzled and frustrated. "What about our work isn't honest? We protect the people of the town from monsters, and they pay us in return. I don't know any work more honest than protecting the lives of people, do you?" Shakir shrugged in a rhetorical manner. "Plus, forget about making your work through craftsmanship in the city. The Adventurer's Guild of Azdavay isn't the only guild in this town, the Tanner's Guild and the Leatherworker's Guild would be on your tail the moment you tried to encroach on their business. I don't think you could gain membership for them, being very much an outsider in every way."

The only experience that Brown had with anything guild-like was his brief stint of being a member of the Freemasons in Ohio as a Master Mason, though the Freemasons were a fraternal organization and not a trade guild like those in Azdavay. He had already grown tired of what he saw as vain and silly ceremonies back in America; Brown truthfully didn't want to try entering any guild even if he could.

Being unable to sell anything outside the permission of guilds did present a challenge though... It seemed that he'd have to court these adventurers, for a bit, to be able to earn funds. "I'd not have any problems helping you out, as long as you do not involve yourself in unsavory work like catching escaped slaves."

"Ah? You were angry about that? Well, I don't really have anything against the slaves, but a man's gotta eat, you know? Somebody else would take the job if we didn't do it."

"Then, we shall not have a deal, ever. 'Better is little with the fear of the Lord than great treasure and trouble therewith.', sir. I believe it'd benefit you to keep this in mind." Brown didn't want to, even indirectly, help slaveowners in any manner. He was not a man of compromise in this matter.

Shakir contented with letting out a grumble of disappointment, before excusing himself. "Bunch of bleeding hearts..." He walked out the building, to take in a whiff of fresh air and tobacco.

Brown was not left alone for long, after an hour of lonely prayer a few visitors entered and exited the guild building as daylight slowly returned. Most of them were there to get updates from the receptionist on the quests they had put up, some had come to put up new ones.

"I need someone to slay five hungry wild dogs. No, not wild dogs, *hungry* wild dogs."

"Have you still not found my dear boy Rucio?"

"Could you do me a one small favor? I need a piece of red mahogany..."

Brown got up his seat, intending to head outside now that the town had woken up. He had to do shopping, although he had no idea how much he could shop using the meager amount of money he had earned. It'd be useful to find out what (and for how much) was available at the market regardless.

The market wasn't lively, as it was still early in the morning, providing opportunity for Brown to quickly march around and mentally take note of the prices. Thankfully, the people of this realm predominantly used Western Arabic numerals, making Brown's job much easier. All of the items on sale were items of food or drink, along with what Brown assumed were small items of religious artwork of some sort like statues, carvings and other bits and bobs.

There wasn't anything of much interest in the market square, so Brown moved onto browsing the workshops of Azdavay's artisans that lay alongside the town's busy streets. He couldn't avoid bumping into people as he walked.



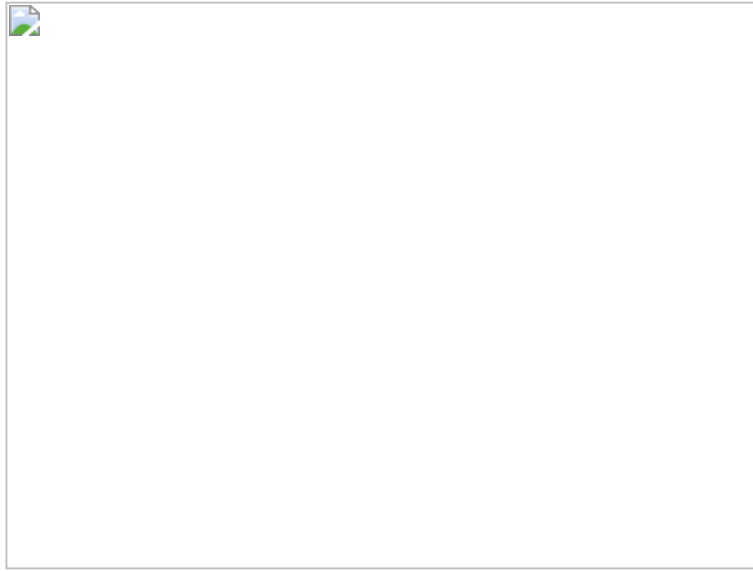
These artisans, in a pre-industrial economy like *Gemeinplatz* where goods couldn't be made and shipped from China or mass-produced in factories, made up the heart of the town's economy. Since a majority of folk, currently including Brown, were illiterate the artisans hung up signs that visually communicated what they did. Tongs for blacksmiths, hammers for masons, barrels for coopers... Brown again checked the prices as he went by.

Brown learned that the bear fur worn by Ayomide cost something around 100 libra, which would be a great boost to their economic fortune if they could find a way to sell it. Another item of interest for Brown was weaponry, he found that the most advanced form of ranged weaponry on offer were crossbows, the cheapest ones starting from 200 libra.

Eventually Brown stumbled upon a sign that interested him, one that had a crude drawing of a scale and some coins, and he entered the workshop. On the inside of the shop sat innumerable bundles of textile consisting primarily of wool and cotton with a few bundles of shiny silk locked behind a glass showcase. No, this place looked too fancy for what Brown needed. He turned back and left the shop, only to see what he was actually looking for across the street. It was a building, with a sign in front that read (in English, and all the other languages common in *Gemeinplatz*) "Second Hand". This was more in line with what he was looking for: somewhere to buy cheap items that'd help him back home.

Upon entrance however, Brown was greeted by something that was clearly *not* a secondhand but a second *hand* shop. This 'second hand' shop was shaped like an alleyway that extended around 150 feet (50 meters) long. Under this alleyway were cages where various people, of all sexes ranging from children to the elderly bound in chains, and a podium of sort at the end of the alleyway where prospective buyers were inspecting their chattel to see if they had any physical problems. Some

inspected the teeth, some commanded the slaves to walk to see if they were lame, some inspected their bodies for musculature. A cacophony of screams and shouts, from the frightened slaves and the shop owners berating them with words and whips, could be heard.



It was thus, slavery in its purest form, “the most barbarous, unprovoked and unjustifiable war of one portion of its citizens against another portion, the only conditions of which are perpetual imprisonment and hopeless servitude”.

Old John Brown had expected to encounter slavery. He had expected to encounter crimes against humanity. He had *not* expected these to play out in the same fashion.

Brown felt greatly sickened, he’d have personally annihilated every proprietor and customer in that damned building if he had the power to. Seeing similar scenes play out in a completely different realm only steeled his resolve, though his resolve to carry out his divine mission to liberate every man on not-Earth hadn’t died down one bit. Gemeinplatz was a land that was foreign to him; humanity was not foreign. Humanity deserved to be free no matter where it came from.

For now, Brown stood silent as he observed the happenings inside the second hand shop. He had to keep himself for doing anything brash that’d ruin his chances, Providence rewarded those who were patient after all.

“Sir Smith, I think she’d be of use?” And reward Providence did. Brown noticed a name that was of interest to him.

Jacob, who was being presented a group of olive-skinned slaves, replied. “Nah, the skin’s too dark. My customers like them white, not exotic. I need only the best for my café. Gimme something that’s like jade.” Brown recognized him from Ayomide’s accounts of the young man.

“Sorry sir, but Sir Dong came by earlier this morning to buy all the ‘jade-beauties’ as he calls them.” The seller scratched his head, thinking of the ways he could salvage this situation. “We have a new batch coming from Kafkasy next month, would you like to reserve one of them?”

“I’d like to reserve three for picking.” Jacob extended his hand to signal that they had a deal. The seller shook his hand in agreement.

“I’ll be sure to reserve the finest for you, sir. Pleasure doing business with you.” The seller had a pleased smile on his face as he parted with Jacob. Clearly, he had just concluded a very profitable deal.

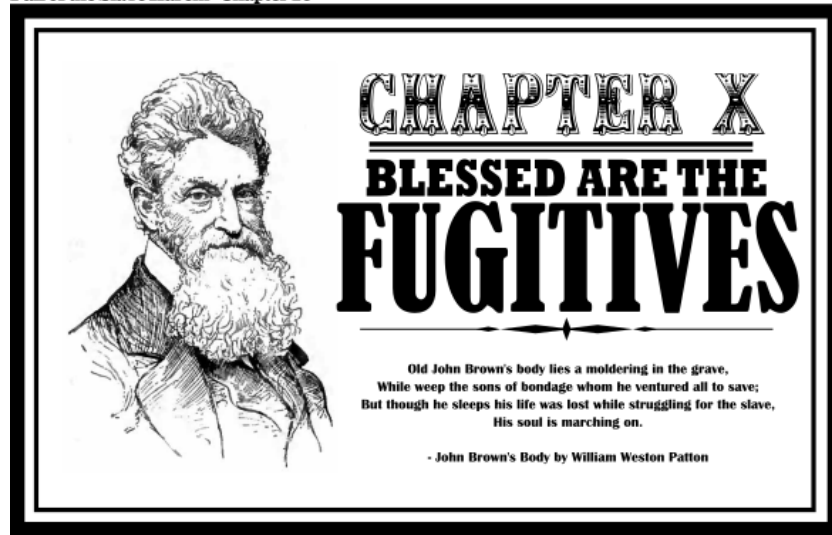
Jacob left, having concluded his business, and Brown tailed him. He thought that he should begin this emancipation business with a man that he had come to know well through Ayomide. Brown patted his pockets to look for the knife he had acquired from the late Watanabe Generico, to check if he was ready to conduct business if it came to that point.

Brown was pleased to feel his knife in its usual spot, but surprised when he felt a flat object in his other pocket. He took out this foreign object from his pocket, which turned out to be a paper with a message in the Gemeinplatzian language transcribed into the Latin alphabet. It was a bit hard to understand the transcribed language, but Brown was able to eventually understand what was written.

TO J. BROWN: TODAY IS EXODUS. BE AWARE. YOUR HELP WILL BE APPRECIATED.

Chapter 13: Chapter X – Blessed are the fugitives.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 10

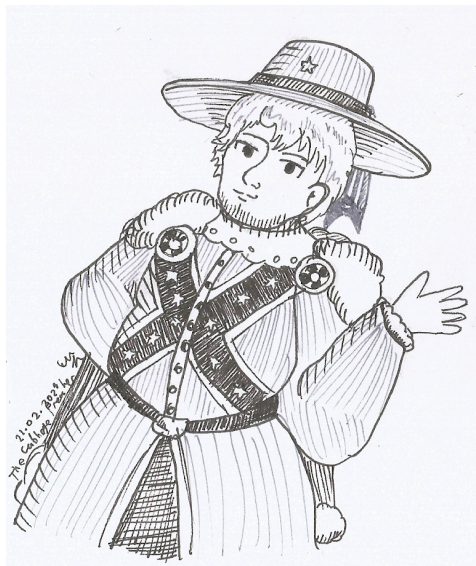


MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

“Welcome home, master.” One of the ‘employees’ of Jacob’s café, a white-skinned waitress, bowed down in greeting. A few of the employees did the same in response, even the ones under his mind-control spell as he made them do so. This felt great to Jacob, a former nobody back in Florida.

Life was great.

Before he could move upstairs to his office, he heard the bell on the door jingle as the first customer of the day entered. “Hmm... *This place is in line with how I imagined it to be.*” To his shock, this customer spoke in English in perfect Yankee dialect. He turned around to see an old man, dressed in a sharp leather coat, perusing his establishment in a most casual manner. This customer seemed to have the appearance of a well-bred gentleman, which aroused Jacob’s curiosity as to why he was visiting a maid café in Azdavay.



Jacob replied to the man in English with his Southern accent. “Howdy- *Ahem*, I meant to say, welcome, sir. How may I help you? I reckon a gentleman like you wouldn’t have an ordinary reason to be here?”

“You see Sir Jacob, I’m on a tour to... study how these ‘maid café’ establishments work.” Brown, over his sixty years of living, had become quite adept in bluffing and BS-ing. He had been working on his script while following Jacob into the café. “I’ve heard yours being mentioned by a few of my acquaintances as a ‘maid café of exemplary quality’, I couldn’t pass by Azdavay without checking it out.”

Jacob was touched by the praise (apparently) being showered on his establishment. The American education system had failed him so greatly that he couldn’t recognize who the man in front of him was. “Oh, now ain’t that nice... Well, sir, I’ll say that you’ve stumbled upon the right establishment! We only have the finest girls here, as y’all will see shortly. I’ll carry you sir, through a tour of my establishment.” Jacob clapped his hands, and the waitress from before showed up to answer him. “What’d you like, sir?”

“Prepare, for me and this gent, a glass of coke and some fried taters and chicken.” He turned back to Brown. “Let me give you a taste of Southern hospitality, sir. It wouldn’t do to give you a tour on an empty stomach.” Jacob then led the Brown upstairs to his lavishly decorated office. It was a brightly lit room, with a huge window looking toward the street and the rooves outside, with a desk for personal business and a table for welcoming guests. “Come on sir, don’t be hesitant.” Jacob and Brown sat face to face.

Jacob initiated the conversation. “Now sir, I’ve been so rude as to not ask your name.”

“I’m...” Brown stopped just before giving his name. It probably wasn’t a good idea to give the Florida man his real identity. “...Isaac Smith. Pleased to meet you.”

“And you’re from the North, I imagine? Which state, and from when?”

“I’m from Connecticut, though I do not get what you mean by ‘when’ I am from, Sir Jacob.”

“I mean, what year was it, on Earth, when you toted yourself to Gemeinplatz? For example, it was 2023 when a truck hit me.” Jacob seemed too happy for a man recounting his death.

Brown was confused as to how this young man could have been killed by some small carriage. Maybe a ‘truck hitting someone’ was a weird Southern phrase from the 21st century he had never heard of? “Right, I believe it was 1859 when a... truck hit me as well.”

Jacob became even more confused than Brown. “Huh? I don’t think trucks existed in the 19th century.”

“I can assure you, young man, that trucks existed back in the 19th century.” He had last seen a truck holding the cannon that pointed at him during his execution.

“Moving on from that, you’re from the 19th century?!” Jacob was surprised to see a man who was, chronologically, more than two hundred years older than him. He dropped his air of formality in excitement. “Man, you’re from back when America was based. Holy moly...”

“*Based?* Based on what?” Brown hadn’t had the chance to be updated on newfangled Internet lingo, nor did he even know what an ‘Internet’ was.

“Ah, sorry. It’s a modern English phrase meaning something like ‘admirable’, or something like that.” Jacob was now sincerely excited to be speaking to someone from the past. “So, do you know what ‘cringe’ means?”

“Uhm... This?” Brown flinched his eyes, cringing as if he was disgusted by something (not to mention the actual disgust he was feeling at this moment).

“I mean, cringe means that too, true. But ‘cringe’ can also be used as an antonym for ‘based’. You got that, Sir Smith?” Jacob couldn’t keep himself from immaturely giggling at the inherent absurdity in teaching a real 19th century man Internet lingo.

Brown himself was internally cringing at the conversation. Thankfully, he was saved for a moment by two servants entering the room with ‘coke’ and ‘fried taters and chicken’. They served these ‘delicacies’ on the table, before bowing a farewell and leaving the room.

“Sir Smith, I advise you taste some of this coke.” The coke rested in a wine glass, as if it was some high-class drink. “It’s nothing like what I had back in America, but I think I got close enough.” Jacob raised one of the glasses to take a sip himself. Brown took one too, and struggled not to spit it out immediately afterwards. The drink, being a mix of carbonated water, weaponnapper nectar and an ungodly amount of sugar, tasted too alien for Brown’s palate.

Brown tried to steer the conversation to a more ordinary place after struggling to gulp down the coke. “*Cough, hack-* Ahem. So, Sir Jacob, what were you meaning to say when America was ‘based’ back in my time?” He was curious as to how the United States had developed in his long absence.

“Yeah, the country really fell off, you know? Became too woke.” Brown wasn’t sure as to what the hell a ‘woke’ could mean, other than being the past tense of ‘wake’, but he continued listening to Jacob “Like, I think you might’ve been hit by the truck before that happened, a civil war happened. Guess who won?”

Brown didn’t know who the sides were in the American Civil War as he had died just before it, but he could make an educated guess as to what it might have been about and why this Southerner was lamenting it. “The North?” Brown was surprised that this young man seemed so angry at an event that had happened over a hundred years before he was born. This young man seemed to be a lost cause.

Jacob seemed to be seething. “Yes! The War of Northern Aggression concluded with the feds curtailing our states’ rights!”

Brown lowered his voice, staring directly at Jacob. “States’ rights to what, young man?”

Jacob didn’t seem taken aback. He had had this argument many times on forums before. “States’ right to determine their own laws and keep their own autonomy, of course!”

Brown kept passively-aggressively staring at Jacob. “States’ rights to determine *what*, young man?”

This was usually the point where Jacob would call his opponent a slur and disengage the debate, but he couldn’t exactly do that when his opponent was a man that was sitting right across him. “Never mind that! What was important was that the poor Southerners were subjected to the tyranny of the majority!” At least moving goal posts still worked, right?

“Yes, but I am still curious, and I’d like it if you could enlighten a poor old man like me on history. States’ rights to *what*, young man?” Brown wasn’t a stranger to debate; this young man was nothing to someone like Frederick Douglass. Such cheap tricks wouldn’t work on him.

Jacob had lost his composure by this point. “States’ rights to treat those...” here he dropped a racial slur that has been omitted from the text “...like they deserve to be treated, of course! You know how many...” here he dropped another one “...frolic in the South, dirtying our land? For God’s sake, some of those dirty commie...” Jacob sure loves that word, doesn’t he “...even elected one of their own asses as president! We gave them the right to vote due to some bleeding hearts crying about ‘racism’ and whatnot! It’s been a slippery slope all the way down to...” yep, that’s another one “...degeneracy since the 1850s!”

Brown was surprised and ashamed to see, from what he had seen as a modern man of the second millennium, a slurry of slurs that could rival the average Southern plantation owner in its audacity.

Jacob paused, going back to ‘hiding his power level’, so to speak. “Ahem... Excuse my heated gaming moment.” He coughed a few times to calm himself down. “Of course, a fine gentleman like you wouldn’t be- What?” His eyes were drawn outside the window, where a group of about a dozen were scurrying on the streets. From the cuffs on their hands and necks he could see that they were slaves. “Jesus Christ, what the hell’s going on?!” He quickly got up from the chair and began watching the ruckus outside, forgetting about his guest.

Brown could see the ruckus outside too. There seemed to be an exodus of slaves... An *exodus*? That seemed familiar to him. Perhaps there was a way he could help...

“Ah shi- IE?!” Jacob found his throat being penetrated by the business end of Brown’s knife. He couldn’t cast spells, thanks to an excess of iron in his body blocking his vocal cords, leaving him without protection.

“Young man, I’d say that you were the one being ‘cringe’ and ‘unbased’ all along. May God have pity on your soul.” Brown held the knife there until Jacob stopped flapping his arms in a futile attempt to preserve his (after)life. The young man’s lifeless body dropped on the floor, running the expensive rug covering the floor. Thankfully, Jacob wasn’t in a state to care about his favorite rug being ruined.

Brown had done it now. It was time to act quickly, quietly, and efficiently. His first act was to being concealing himself. He quickly took the pompous fur cape of Jacob, his very-much-wide-brimmed hat, and his table cloth. He wore the cape and the hat to disguise his clothing, and wrapped the table cloth around as a bandana to conceal his face. Brown had been stuck for two months up on some mountain without being able to do anything; he was now ready to brawl.

While Brown was busy being a master of disguise, he heard the loud thuds from the bottom floor, along with trays crashing down and plates breaking. He quickly ran downstairs, to find the maid café in a state of utter chaos. The few customers in the café were shouting in panic, the non-mind-controlled slaves were joining them in panic, and the former mind-controlled slaves were laying on the ground.

One of the customers, a with clothing even more pompous than the late Jacob’s, noticed Brown as he was heading down. Brown hadn’t had time to wash his bloodied hands, one could easily understand that there had been some sort of crime committed upstairs.

This gentleman, furious at his fine dining being ruined, decided to apprehend this impostor among them. “[Binding Vines]!” Vines shot out of his hand, and headed toward Brown. Brown answered to this gentleman’s cheap parlor trick by slashing the vines with his knife before they could reach him. Brown began running toward the gentleman, slashing through the barrage of vines flying towards him. It wasn’t that Brown was too experienced in countering magic attacks; it was that the gentleman was too inexperienced in combat and attacked in a predictable manner by always aiming for Brown’s legs.

Brown took off the tablecloth of one of the tables, and a cacophony of crashing plates and cups ensued. “Sir, I think you should halt that uncouth mouth of yours casting the Devil’s work.” He folded the tablecloth into a rope-like shape while continuing to run towards the gentleman, who had exhausted his mana at this point.

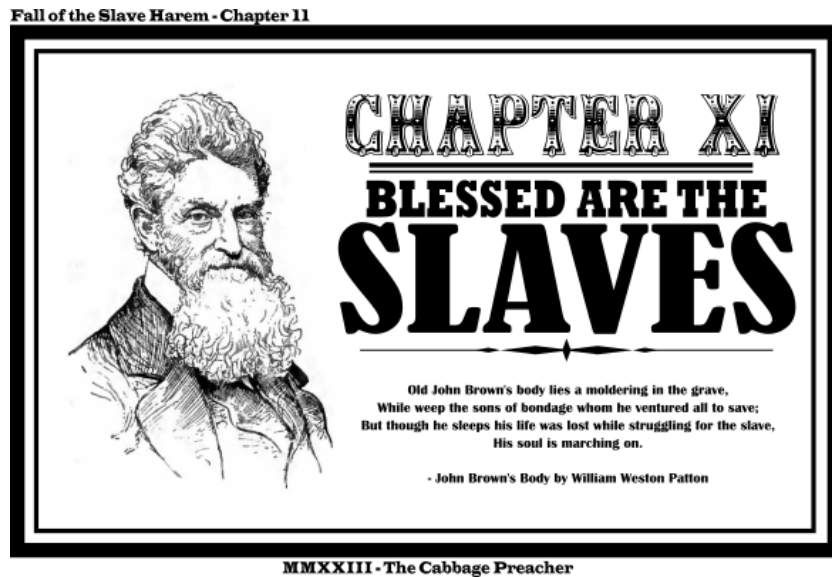
The gentleman drew his saber, getting ready to enter close-quarters combat. Brown had other plans.

This gentleman was equally inexperienced in non-magical combat, so his stance was abysmal. He held the sword sideways, with not a shred of confidence in his face. Still, someone holding a sword was still dangerous no matter their skill. Brown began with remedying this issue, by kicking the gentleman’s hand holding the sword. The gentleman let go off the sword in pain; it flew off to the corner of the room. Before the gentleman could recover, Brown restrained and gagged the gentleman using the tablecloth / rope to block him from casting any spells. Holding the gag with his one hand and a knife next to the gentleman’s throat, Brown announced to the room:

“Alright, ladies and gentlemen, calm down and listen to me or else this man’s life shall be forfeit!” Brown hadn’t planned any of this; he was winging it to the best of his capabilities at this point. He didn’t even know if the hostage he captured had any value. The people in the room, who were now all slaves as all the other customers had already escaped from the front door, suddenly took notice of Brown. They were quite confused as to why some old man was threatening them.

“Now that I have gotten your attention, I’d like to announce the beginning of your exodus.”

Chapter 14: Chapter XI – Blessed are the slaves.



Brown now had a group of slaves staring at him, they of course knew him not. He had only planned to carry out reconnaissance in the town and learn the situation in this foreign realm; he didn't expect that he'd be having to lead an exodus of slaves this early. The old man took in a deep breath, and let it out while closing his eyes. It was going to be fine. The Holy Spirit would surely lead them to liberty, or so thought Brown. Having confidence, no matter the source, helped one immensely.

He opened his eyes again to face the crowd cautiously observing him. Brown was calm.

"Ahem, as you might have noticed if you've peeked out of the window, there's currently a great exodus of slaves in Azdavay. I have come here, to slay your master and help lead you to freedom. God willing, today you shall become freemen."

One of the former slaves asked a question that everybody wanted to ask. "Who are you?!"

"I'm John Brown, the rest of my life story can be told later. Time is of the essence, ladies and gentleman. If you want to follow me, do so. If you don't then don't. We must act quickly, quietly and efficiently. Those who are willing to follow me, please raise your hands." Brown looked at the audience to see how willing they looked. While he was a total stranger, he had gained more than a modicum of respect after having slain their former master. Plus, his calm and confident demeanor gave the impression that he really had a plan. He didn't, but having the former slaves organize and group together would help their chances.

One reluctant hand was raised, and eleven more hands followed. This was a bit more than half the maid café. Brown was honestly surprised that he even managed to get that many people to agree with him in this situation. "Good, then please step forward. Four of you, go up to Jacob's room and take any valuables you can find. Most important are weapons, bags and any item of jewelry. The other four, go to the kitchen and take all the food you can. Store them in pots, we'll need them for cooking later. Also get ready to make a fire."

He handed his knife, along with the hostage gentleman over to a freeman that looked physically strong. With his freed hands he picked up the sword that the gentleman had dropped. "You can hold

on to our special guest for now. The rest of you, gather anything that could be used as a weapon for you and your comrades.” He held the sword up high, and swung it as if he was commanding troops for battle. “Now, forward! You shall get liberty, or you shall get death!”

Brown’s fervor and energy seemed to have rubbed off on to the group. They quickly discussed who should do what, and then split off to complete their mission. Brown personally oversaw the search for improvised weaponry.

The trio assigned to the job quickly searched the places they knew had potential weapons: the axe nominally for cutting firewood, knives in the kitchen, mops and other items of cleaning... They quickly rounded the potentially most lethal for use. The other groups had returned by the time they were done.

The quartet in Jacob’s room had found their master’s ornamental weapon stash, and returned with a spear and three swords. They also had found two satchels, which were now filled with coins and jewelry. The spear was given to a former guardsman, and the three swords were similarly given to those with prior combat experience. The rest of the group got the makeshift weaponry.

The kitchen team had returned pots filled with vegetables and fruits; items crucial to the groups survival once they got out of the town. They had also set fire to the kitchen while leaving. Soon the flames, of revolution and literal flames, would engulf the rest of the maid café.

The group of twelve looked energetic and jubilant now that their initial shock had worn off. The thought of liberty coming ever so closer with every drawing second, of them having a hand in saying how their lives would go on from now, gave them great fervor.

Brown observed this group with great joy. It seemed that, wherever he went, the base human desire for liberty and freedom was the same. “Alright, are we ready?”

“Aye aye!”

“Then let’s get this over with.” Brown opened the door, and pointed his sword outside. “Don’t forget, it’s either liberty or death out there. Forwards, march!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Brown’s twelve apostles ran through the streets, swimming through a sea of confused onlookers. The town guard seemed to be busy with the group that Brown had seen earlier, so they had (so far) not seen any opposition to their escape. This tactic of shock-and-awe-and-run-away worked perfectly until the squad turned over and...

“Halt, and surrender!”

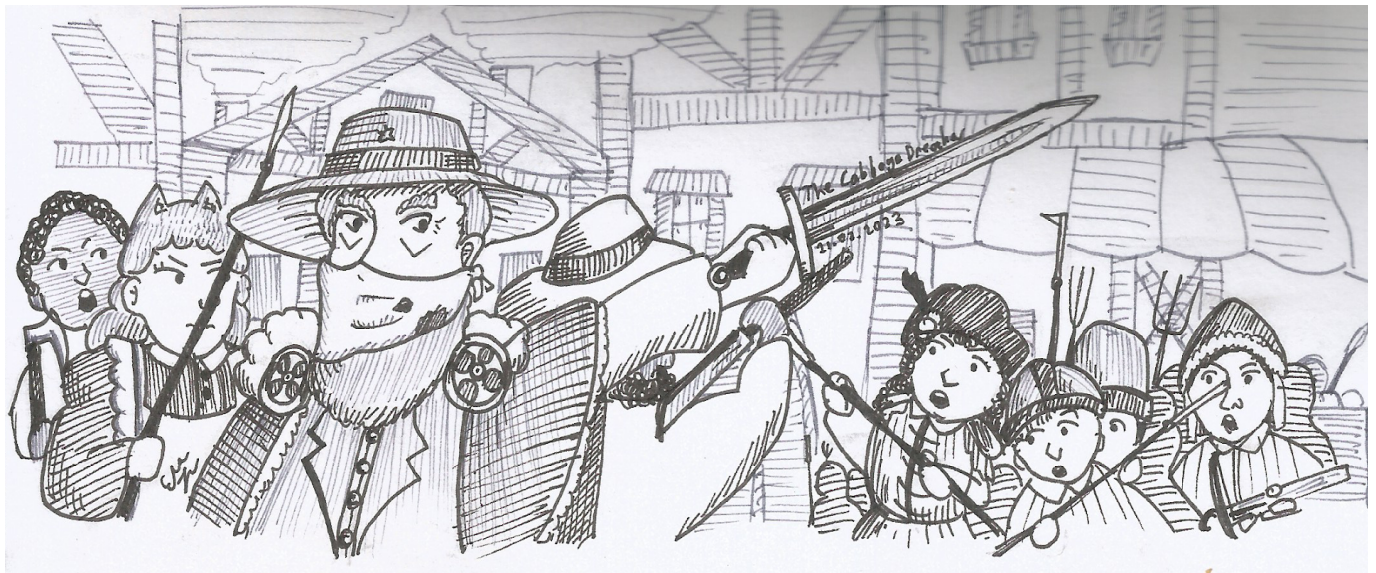
They found a street which was quite a basket case. A group of adventurers and concerned citizens had cornered the group of escaping slaves that Brown had seen previously. The cornered slaves were armed with whatever they could find, in a situation similar to Brown’s. What was odd about this group was that, among the barely clothed slaves, there also seemed to be a few people in nondescript commoner’s garb, with the strange addition of a black hood that covered their faces completely. These hooded figures were armed with quarterstaves tipped with lead.

One of these hooded figures seemed to be the leader of the group, and they were giving a speech. “We shall not surrender, but we’ll go peacefully if you’d only let us. We only desire our

emancipation and nothing more!” The response to this request was a storm of insults and other unpleasant words that needn’t be mentioned. Still, the mob seemed reluctant to begin fighting. Being potentially injured to catch some slaves didn’t seem too appealing to any of them.

Upon seeing that the mob of concerned citizenry would not yield, the aforementioned hooded figure readied their quarterstaff for battle. “People, we have a right to have one of these two things in the world: Liberty or death. If we can’t have one, then we shall only have the other, for we shall fight as long as our strength lasts and none shall take us alive!” Their speech seemed to have roused the cornered slaves, who charged to meet the mob of citizens.

Observing the cornered slaves charge, Brown also addressed his own squad of former slaves. “You see your brothers and sisters over there, let us—” The men of the maid café charged before Brown could even finish his speech. He joined them in this charge as well, brandishing the sword of the gentleman against the gentleman of the town.



With the addition of Brown’s group, the citizen’s mob was sandwiched between two forces. This street fight lacked any tact or tactics as it devolved into individual fighting between inexperienced combatants with the few experienced combatants drowning in the sea of incompetency.

While the numbers of the mob were bigger, their morale was low compared to those fighting for their own liberty. Being surrounded from two sides also didn’t help. The first ones to break were the armed shopkeepers and artisans, who had only joined to protect their property from potential looting. Then came the adventurers, they didn’t exactly care about fighting if it didn’t involve any money. They’d be paid to hunt for the slaves later anyways. The miniscule town guard, seeing that they were now outnumbered, decided to formulate a ‘tactical retreat’ which involved them legging it without any tactics.

The street was now left littered with the bodies of the dead and wounded. Brown was left with eleven apostles, and the former cornered slave group had lost a dozen or so men. They didn’t have time to grieve the dead however, it’d be bad news if the town guard properly mobilized itself to meet the exodus.

“John Brown, you’ve shown yourself at last.” The head of the hooded figure squad waved to Brown. “Your help is appreciated. I hope that we’ll get to see each other again very soon.” They then lead their group away from Brown’s, splitting up to confuse the town guard. Brown didn’t

have much time to ponder, similarly leading his squad of twelve towards the gates while doing his best to go through the backstreets. The residents of the town had gone hiding in their homes, afraid of what they saw as a roving band of savages, leaving the streets empty.

Thankfully, Azdavay wasn't a that big of a town. It only took the group a few minutes to reach one of the gates, which were just two big wooden doors with two guards stationed to protect it. They had been expecting for the escaping slaves to go for the gates, with their crossbows ready to take aim at any unwelcome visitors.

The former slaves were much more athletic compared to Brown, who was about to enter his sixties, and the sword-carrying managed to climb the palisades without being noticed. The guards, taking aim at the gates and not their own palisades like sensible people, were taken by surprise and slain on the spot. The swordsmen came back, now also wielding two pavises and carrying two crossbows looted from the guardsmen.

The only thing between them and freedom was now the wooden gate, which was locked by a comically large plank stuck between the door's handles. Thankfully, one of the former slaves still had the axe that had been taken from the kitchen of the maid café.

While they were busy with chopping the plank, unwelcome visitors had decided to show their face. A quartet of adventurers, all equipped with crossbows, were running towards the fugitives to take aim. They hadn't had a chance to load their crossbows, they begin loading while staying at a safe distance. In response, the pavise-carrying swordsmen set their shields towards them to protect their comrades. It wasn't a perfect defense however, as two pavises weren't enough to cover everyone.

Four bolts ran out across the street, one of them managing to land a hit right on the knee of a former slave. The wounded man cried out as he fell on the ground. The adventurers were reloading. The plank was taking a lot longer than expected to break. Things weren't going well.

Before another wave of bolts came raining down, Brown noticed a familiar adventurer running towards them. "Brown, old man, slow down for the Otherworld's sake! I've been trying to catch up to you for..." It was Shinasi. The slaves readied their weapons to meet their foe, only for him to drop his spear onto the ground as a gesture of goodwill. "It looks like you all need a shield, sir." Shinasi joined the line of pavises amongst the confused stares of the former slaves.

"Young man why are you-" The sound of bolts hitting the shields interrupted Brown's speech, only for a moment. "You were trying to catch a slave just a few weeks ago, why are you here?"

"Well, I've had a lot of time to think since that giant onion almost wiped us out." Another wave of bolts crashed on the shield wall. "The fugitive coming to save us wasn't an accident, was it? Saving strangers in a tight situation, sir, is very much admirable according to me and the Adventurer's Code." Yet another wave of bolts interrupted him. "What- What I'm trying to tell is, if there's someone like that amongst the fugitives, then why do we have to hunt down and enslave these people?" Shinasi had finally figured out something that, quite frankly, should be common sense.

"I'm glad that the Holy Spirit has led you on to a more righteous path, young man."

The plank locking the gate finally split in twain. The former slaves cheered, running as fast as humanly possible while those bearing shields covered their escape. Then, making sure there was no one left behind, the shield-bearers and Brown made their tactical retreat as well, disappearing into the dense woodland of Azdavay.

In this chapter of the John Brown Isekai:

The City Before MC Visits:

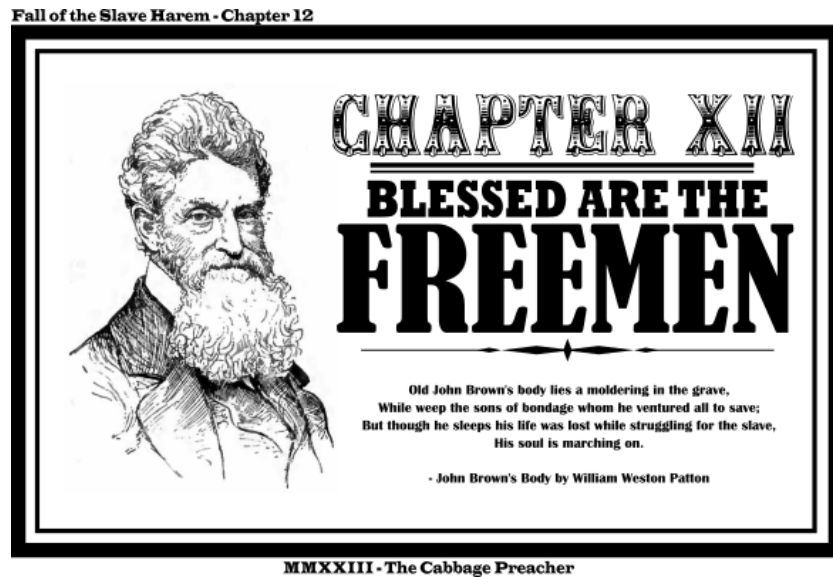


The City After MC Visits:



([Original post](#) by u/Dak_Tiny_PP)

Chapter 15: Chapter XII – Blessed are the freemen.



Ayomide was walking in a circle around the forest, waiting for Brown to return. She couldn't move much: she and the old man had agreed to meet up in this spot outside of Azdavay.

"May this holy spirit, the holy father, or holy whatever, that leads the old man bring him back safely." It was getting late. Too late. The old man should have wrapped up his surveying and shopping by now.

Just as Ayomide began considering packing up and returning back to the cave, he heard a small crowd chittering and chattering while getting closer to her spot. She got one of her spears ready, in case she needed to make a last stand.

"Young lady? Are you here? For the sake of your Maker, please put down that spear for we need no further bloodshed today." Brown hadn't actually come into view of Ayomide; he had just made a correct guess.

One of the freemen, who had been subject to Brown's grand speeches for the last few hours along with the rest of the group, sighed. "Geezer, who you talking to? Holy spirits, lords, and now young ladies? What screws loose in your mind?"

"I think he's correct about this young lady." Shinasi, who had followed the group outside, replied. He was greeted with a spear landing an inch off his foot, Ayomide following suit.

The voice of Shinasi had seemed familiar to Ayomide. "Alright, old man, what business does this lightskin, slave-hunting son of a donkey's prick have with you? And..." She noticed her former colleagues from the maid café "...what's with the sudden reunion?"

"*Ahem!* Firstly, those words about a donkey's you-know-what is not a suitable word to be used by a young lady or any couth man." Brown cleared his throat. "Secondly, I believe that Shinasi has seen the grace of the Almighty and had his steps directed in a more righteous direction. Lastly, young lady, we have had an unexpected exodus."

Ayomide didn't look too nonplussed by the mention of an exodus. "Right, and were there any suspicious hooded figures in this exodus of yours?"

"Indeed, young lady. How would you happen to know? Did- Did you happen to get a vision or revelation or-" Brown was still convinced that Ayomide might be blessed by the Almighty after her 'miracle' of healing Brown's arm.

Ayomide was sure that she wasn't blessed by anyone though, for her entire life looked far from blessed. "No, no! I had some hooded figure, named Kyauta, come visit me yesterday night. She said that 'Moses' was planning an exodus, and I told her that Moses should be at Kanein and not at Casamonu."

"I'm happy that you are keeping up with your Bible study. 'Have time for the Lord, and the Lord will have time for you', young lady. I think the Almighty gave his time for us today." She wasn't keeping up with anything, the constant Biblical references made by Brown made it hard to not pick up something or another. "If there is another abolitionist society operating in this area, then I think it is of upmost importance that we meet them."

While Brown and Ayomide were conversing, the freemen had divided the loot from Jacob's establishment among themselves. After this dividing was done, seven of the freemen split from the group to continue on their merry way. Two of the freemen had already left the group, taking the hostage gentleman with them, while on the road. By the time Brown ended his conversation, he had only two (plus Shinasi and Ayomide) apostles left.

Brown decided to address the remaining two men. They hadn't gotten the chance to properly converse to each other on the road. "Gentlemen, I'm happy to see that you have stayed around. My name is John Brown, of Connecticut. I'd be glad to have your names and occupations."



The first to reply was a man that was equally as tall as Brown (somewhere around 6 feet / 1.82m tall). He still carried the axe he had used to chop off the plank that blocked the gate. "Hakim, sir." He took off his hat in salute, revealing his hair, or lack thereof. "I used to be cooking in the kitchen, until your folks came around. I know the plants of this area well. Reckon I can give a hand in that."

"Glad to have you." Brown then turned around to a young man who was somewhere in his early teens. "And you, young man?"

“I... don’t have a name, but they call me ‘Tater’, ‘cause I carried taters. Guess I could carry anything, if need be.”

“You’re a young man Tater, you’ll learn anything quickly, God willing.” Brown seemed to be satisfied with the potential applicants. “Gentleman, I extend my invitation for you to join me in the fight against slavery. You are now free as the Almighty intended, and there’s nothing nobler to do with your freedom but fight for the freedom of one’s brothers and sisters!”

Hakim and Tater looked at each other, trying to gauge each other’s opinion. They didn’t exactly desire to be stuck in what sounded to be a long war against slavery, but they also didn’t know what else they’d be stuck with. Would it not be better to die fighting than live and then die running?

“I- I’d join, sir.” The first one to make up his mind was Hakim.

“I’m no sir, Mister Hakim. Call me captain, mister, Brown or anything else that is not discourteous, but don’t call me sir. There’s no one above you but the Lord now.” He extended his hand toward Hakim.

“Understood, captain.” Hakim shook hands with Brown, finalizing his membership.

Tater grabbed hold of Brown’s hand as well. “Captain, I’m in too!”

A surprise third hand entered this cluster of hands, this newcomer belonging to Shinasi. “Guess I already made this choice when I ran towards you back there.

Brown smiled at his new recruits. “May our Heavenly Father grant us victory!”

“So... Who’s this heavenly father?”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

After having greeted Brown, Hakim and Tater approached their former coworker, Ayomide. She had been standing in the corner, warming herself near a fire that she had started.

Hakim spoke when he was sure that he was in a safe distance from Brown. “Total bonkers, this old man of yours. Holy spirits, fathers, lords... And he referred to all us darkskin as ‘Mister’ and ‘Lady’, never seen any lightskin do that before.”

“When I’d hear you being called ‘young lady’, I thought we were going to be seeing some haughty, lightskinned noble, not the old waitress. You ain’t dead? Seems that you’re enjoying the lady life.”

“Course I am not dead.” *Though, I almost was.* “How’s the master after I ran? Hope he didn’t treat you too badly.”

“He was fine with yelling a bit, thankfully.” Shinasi did his best to imitate Jacob’s voice. “‘Damned harlot! She owes me two thousand libra for her worthless, dung-filled head!’ and stuff like that.”

“And now he’s dead, isn’t he? Wish we all had something to celebrate with...” Ayomide had been drinking water and slime for the last few months. She desperately needed something that tasted different.

“Well, I don’t have bad news, ‘young lady’.” Tater had been part of the quartet that raided the kitchen. He had been carrying a pot, opening its lid he revealed the pot to be full of oranges and a

filled wineskin. “Take whatever you need.”

“You’re too young to have that wine. Gimme that, boy.” Ayomide took the wineskin, and drank half of it. She handed over the rest to Hakim, and took some oranges with her freed hand.

“Young lady. We need you a new name, for the fancy new title you got.” Tater tried to think of something, and his eyes stumbled upon the oranges currently consumed by Ayomide. “What ‘bout ‘Lady Orange’?”

Hakim burst out with laughter at this ridiculous proposition. “Lady Orange? I think you’ve found the best name for our young lady.”

Ayomide stood up, and did her best to curtsy as if she was the long-lost daughter of the royal family. “Greetings, ye filthy peasantry, My name is Lady Orange, from the illustrious House of Crappingsburg-Scheissenstein. Umm... O-ho-hohoho!” She began playing with her hair, assuming the position that could rival the haughtiest of the haughtiest. “What d’ya’ll think?”

“You’re gonna steal the princess’ jobs if you keep this up.” The trio laughed in thought of princesses being left unemployed by Ayomide.

The conversation went deep into the night like so, Ayomide and her coworkers finally getting to bond with each other.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

61st of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

Tater groaned as the mountain path winded and winded further. “We there yet, Lady Orange?”

Ayomide sighed. It seemed that this silly nickname was going to stay. “We ain’t far. See, it’s there.”

Brown raised his hand, to signal to the group that they should halt. “Alright, up that cliff and our journey is going to be over for today.” The group followed him up the small cliff leading to the headquarters of the organization yet-to-be-named. “Welcome to our humble home. I hope you’ll enjoy your stay here.”

The group entered the cave, which was mostly empty aside from piles of soap and pottery. “As you can see, there are many things that can be improved, with your and God’s help of course.”

“That’s an understatement if I ever seen one...” Hakim wasn’t exactly sure where they’d even begin with. Nobody was exactly sure. Still, they held on to the vague hope that they things might work out fine.

“Now, if you’d please sit down and listen.” The group sat down on the cave floor, and Brown joined them. “I’d like to begin the First Session of the Provisional Council of... Curry. This cave is equally all our home, so I think of it best to choose our plan of action in a suitably democratic fashion.”

Hakim raised his hand. “Captain! What’s a ‘democratic’?”

“It means that we all get an equal say as to how things are going to be run around here. I am no king or lord, nor shall I aim to be a king or lord, nor shall ye accept any mortal kings or lords.”

Tater was the one who raised his hand this time. “Who decides stuff then?”

“As I said, we all have an equal say. We discuss with each other what we want to do, and then take a vote to decide whose suggestion we go with.”

“Ah! I heard of that. The big folk in the town meet in their town hall to do something like that. Though, of course, we ain’t gotten a chance to see any of that.” Hakim had heard of Jacob complain about meetings in the town hall.

“Yeah, I’ve visited one of those meetings once. Not as a participant, just as security. It seemed a bit boring, but it wouldn’t hurt to try.” replied Shinasi.

Ayomide nodded in agreement. “That seems reasonable to me. Never liked those lords anyways. Let’s not have one, for a change.”

“Alright, then let’s take a vote. Who agrees that we should all convene as a council to make decisions? Raise your hands if you agree, don’t if you don’t.” Everybody in the room raised their hands.

Thus, the Provisional Council of Curry was born. Everybody in the room then fell silent and idle, unsure of what to do. They weren’t exactly ready for this moment.

Shinasi broke the silence. “So, when do we meet again?”

“Uhm... Every day?”

“That too much, clearly. Every... ten days would be better.”

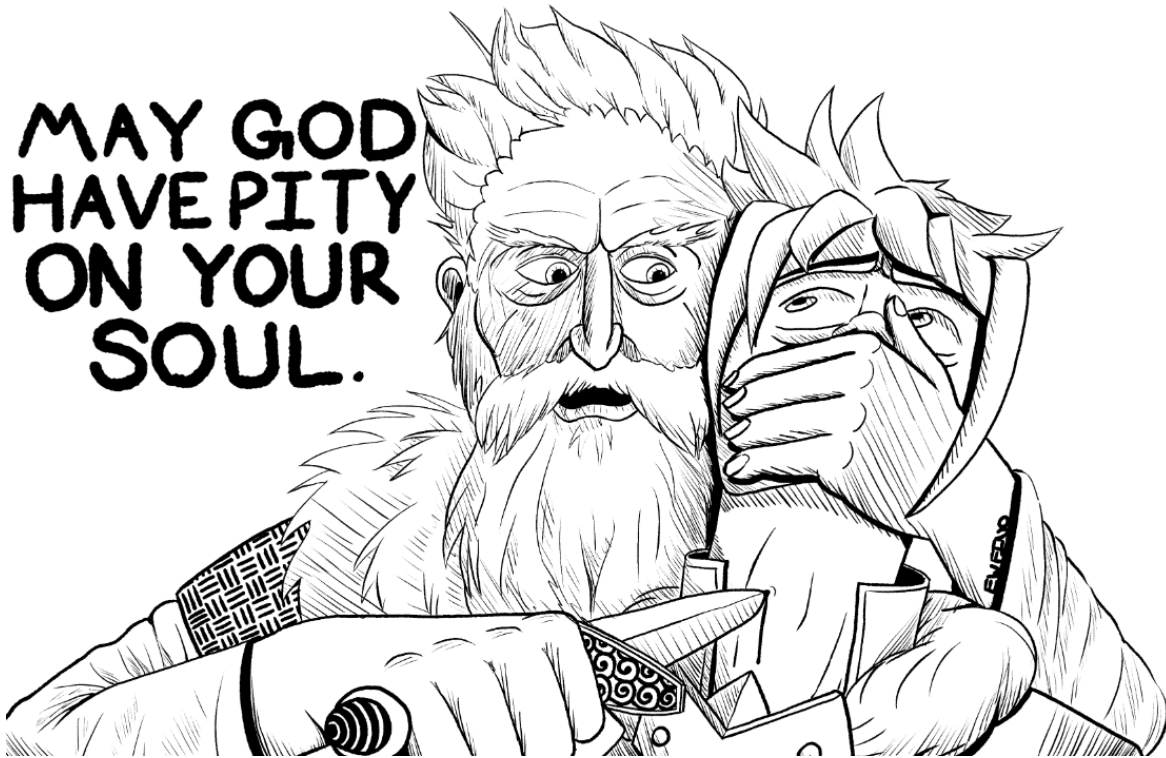
“Let’s go with a month?”

“No, that’s too sparse!”

A different idea sprouted from every head in the room. Thus, democracy was born.

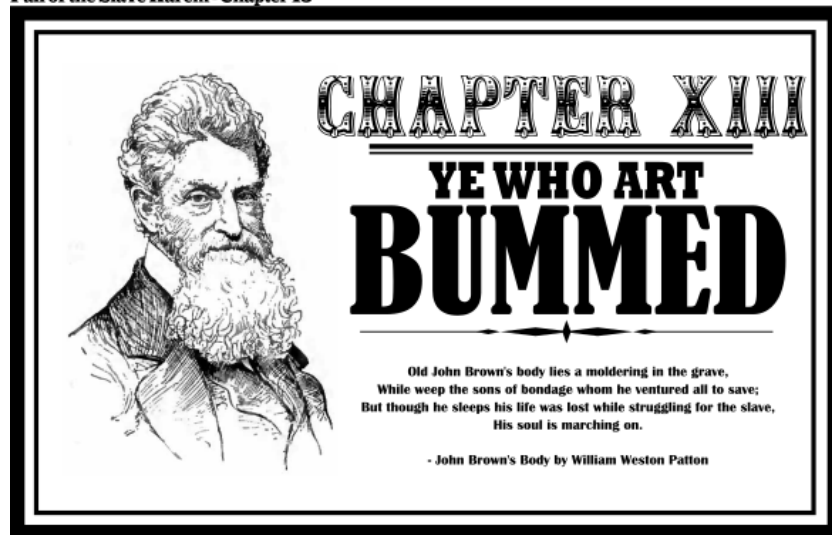
Chapter 16: Chapter XIII – Ye who art bummed.

So, the John Brown Isekai has got its first piece of fanart and it's a really awesome one of Jacob being Brown'd. Check it out!



This piece was made by [u/Leading_Discount_562](#) (a.k.a. [Ewfino](#)) and posted to the [John Brown Isekai subreddit](#). Thank you for reading, and thank you so much for appreciating the John Brown Isekai so much that you'd make artwork inspired by it!

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 13



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person now that I was free. There was such a glory over everything. The sun came up like gold through the trees, and over the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven.

- Harriet Tubman, as quoted in *Harriet, The Moses of Her People* (1886) by Sarah Hopkins Bradford

70th of Spring, 5859

Azdavay, County of Casamonu

A group of guards, garbed in most fashionable attire, flanked an equally fashionable carriage. “Make way! Make way for the count!” The crowd moved like a sea being parted in twain, making way for someone who looked way too important to be in Azdavay.



This group of upmost pompousness stopped in front of the Azdavay town hall, and a man came out of the carriage. He was a middle-aged man, bearing a blood red cloak that'd put actual blood to shame. His hoses were made of famous Prusian silk, his hat bore the feather of some exotic bird he couldn't even pronounce the name of. A servant, dressed sharply but of course not as sharply as his lord, followed the lord out of his carriage.

“This place really is one giant pigsty filled with adventurers.” The lord spat on the ground in contempt. “Let us make haste, lest the mud of these pigs soil us.” They entered the town hall, being met with a bubbling crowd packed tightly into a room that was probably not larger than an actual pigsty.



The crowd calmed down once they noticed who had stepped into the room. The servant following the lord called out to the room to make sure everyone got the memo. “Ladies and gentlemen, His Excellency Leon Satō-Wang, Count of Casamonu.” Everybody in the room got up from their seats to bow down out of courtesy. Who wouldn’t want to be a sycophant when faced with a man who has enough money to buy himself a servant, whose only job is to call out his name?

The mayor of the town quickly ran toward Leon, bowing down again and again as he made his plea. “Your Excellency, you have most likely heard the slave uprising in our town...” Leon had heard all about it since the mayor had specifically mentioned this event multiple times in his letter. “...it’s terrible, Your Excellency! Many fine men were slain.”

Leon slowly walked over to his seat while conversing with the mayor. “How severe is the damage?”

“It has only been a week since the uprising, we haven’t yet had enough time to compile a complete report of all the damages. But, a report by the operator of the slave market reported over thirty items from his stock missing, and the local Adventurer’s Guild has had twenty-one reported cases of missing slaves. And...” The mayor shuddered at the thought he was about to convey “One of the knights in the city was found dead, most likely killed by slaves. An Awmereighkan otherworlder named Sir Jacob Smith of Florida, may his soul rest peacefully in an Otherworld.”

“Are you serious? A dead otherworlder?” Leon sat on the seat, which sat in the center of the room, reserved for him. He heaved a deep sigh of concern. Someone daring to kill an otherworlder? That was quite an upset especially to a man who had otherworlder blood like Leon.

Lightskins ruled over darkskins and the otherworlders ruled the lightskins. That’s how things were *ideally* supposed to work. Darkskins going against otherworlders constituted a complete toppling of the pyramid that was Gemeinplatzian society.

“Don’t worry sir, we’ve already found the perpetrators of this vicious rebellion. They’ve already been hung, maybe you’ve seen their bodies while passing the gates?” Of course, they couldn’t have found the perpetrator. The mayor had targeted one of his rivals’ beloved slaves and used them as convenient scapegoats.

“You have done a good job, mayor.” Leon could guess that the perpetrators wouldn’t have been found so easily as well; he didn’t care. Hanging a few of those darkskins to calm the populace was a win-win situation for them. Though, it was not like the officials needed to do the hanging, for the populace had already hanged a few of the slaves themselves.

With their lord seated, the crowd had gotten rowdy again.

“Your Excellency, please send some of your men to help us!”

“We need money to stay afloat! My family is in a tight situation since our slave escaped!”

“Yeah! We should even get the Adventurer’s Guild of Casamonu to help us out.”

There wasn’t much that Leon could do. Sending some men *after* the uprising had already happened wouldn’t help, nor could he command any of the guilds of the city. The town itself was under supervision of the mayor anyways, this wasn’t Leon’s job. He turned to his servant standing beside him. “Just go with Plan B.” The servant took out a piece of paper from his pockets, and unfurled it.

The servant read the paper with the most serious voice he could muster. “*Ahem...* His Excellency says that his thoughts and prayers are with the people of this town. We send our condolences to the loved ones of the brave knight Sir Jacob who fell during this incident. His Excellency will do all he can do on his end to eradicate any organizations that may be behind this uprising.” The people in the town hall seemed to be pleased with this answer; a few pleased murmurings could be heard in the room.

The mayor clapped his hands to grab the attention of everyone in the room. “We have eternal gratitude for His Excellency, and we ask for forgiveness for having taken him out of his precious duties. Now, as to what Azdavay will do...”

Leon’s thoughts drifted away from the town hall as their mundane discussions began once more.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



71st of Spring, 5859
Aroghlie / Zon’guldac, Union of Dwarves

On the coast of the Dark Sea sat the grand port of Aroghlie, the largest in Northern Gemeinplatz. Sailing merchant ships went to-and-fro, delivering and taking goods as fast as humanly possible. The port and the settlement around it were mostly inhabited by humans, while the heart of Aroghlie lay in the Curry Mountain range.

There, inside the mountains, lay the true Aroghlie of coal, steel, and industry, of dwarven industry with no rival.



The territory of Zon'guldac was abundant with coal, and most of it was extracted here by the dwarves. Dwarven life was dedicated and shaped by coal: They wore simple clothes that were easy to wash coal dust off of, had physiques that made it easy for them to navigate the tight mineshafts that lead to veins of coal, their lungs had evolved to be resistant against the negative effects of inhaling coal dust 24/7.

The dwarves had gathered, like they usually did every season, at the Supreme Council of Dwarves. The council room was shaped like a dome, with a grand round table sitting in the middle of it. Around this table sat the representatives of dwarven industry, who were all elected yearly by the workers of each industry to represent them. Flanking these representatives were the ordinary dwarves who wished to observe the proceedings.

These representatives were mostly discussing ordinary internal issues like steel production, income from trade and mining accidents. Except for their elven neighbors that lived alongside them in Zon'guldac, the outside world rarely bothered the dwarves and the dwarves didn't bother the outside world. Dwarven trade with the outside world was mostly based on getting resources that couldn't be easily gathered in their part of the Curry Mountain, such as wood, iron and crops.

Tangible goods weren't the only import however, for the port also imported rumors from the rest of Gemeinplatz. Today, something that seemed relatively minor to the dwarves had been imported from Casamonu. The one tasked with delivering this news was the Lord of Trade incumbent Whitebeard Er'temirr.

In front of every seat in the council lay a small hammer used to call attention. After waiting for an opportune time when discussion slowed down, Whitebeard hit the stone table with the hammer to calling the attention of every dwarf in the room. "Everyone, I have interesting news to share from the east."

The dwarves quieted down and began listening intently, as changes in the outside usually meant that changes were needed in all branches of industry. “Today I had a meeting with newly arrived refugees: two humans who had newly escaped from slavery.”

One of the representatives replied. “So? Refugees come here to escape something pretty often. It’s not an unusual thing, I think.” Aroghlie wasn’t a part of the Gemeinplatz Empire, nor did the dwarves practice slavery, meaning that it was a safe harbor for those needing to escape.

“The unusual thing was that these refugees hadn’t escaped alone. They claimed, and I have verified claim with other merchants coming from Casamonu, that an uprising of slaves had broken out in the town of Azdavay.” She searched her great white beard, finding nestled within it the notes she had taken for the council. “Apparently the leaders in this uprising were two humans, one whose name I do not yet know and the other named... ‘Isaac Smith’. They’re either part of one organization or are two organizations that worked together, I have been unable to get clarification on that part. That is all the information I have as of now, the events have only developed last week.”

Another one of the representatives tapped the hammer on the table. “Since you’ve brought this up, am I right to assume you have a plan for action?”

“Right.” Whitebeard nodded her head. “I believe that this event might be the harbinger of a shift in the political situation of Northern Gemeinplatz, or Gemeinplatz as a whole if it comes to that. This is one uprising, a successful one at that, that might inspire others to commit similar acts once the news spreads out of Casamonu.”

She hammered the table again, to draw the attention of some of the representatives who had drifted away in boredom. “Thus, I think that this esteemed council will agree that it is of utmost import that we keep close watch and prepare to realign our policy. I’d like to request permission to send humans from the port to actively relay the events happening in Casamonu, and make contact with the organizers of the uprising if possible.”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



7 May 2023 / 72nd of Spring, 5859
Seoul, Republic of Korea

Far, far away from the dwarven city of Aroghlie, or any city in Gemeinplatz for that matter, stood the capital and soul of (South) Korea: Seoul.

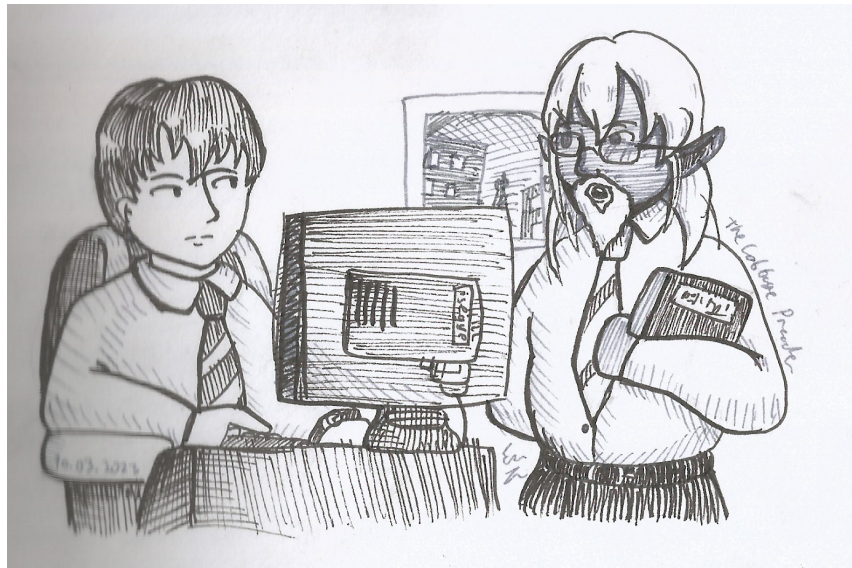
Under the scraping skyscrapers and enlightening lights of the city sat a young man, one certain Kim Seong-Min. Of course, he was no usual young man, or else he'd not be mentioned in this story at all. This young man was a millionaire (in terms of US dollars) and CEO of the Isegye Company, dealing in business of the otherworldly kind.

His story was one of tragedy followed by great success. He had begun his life as the son of an office worker, a nobody. Unlike other rich people, who made their money thanks to their family already having money, Kim had to crawl his way to success with the hardest of work. Hard work, of course meaning 'stumbling upon a portal that leads to another world'.

There, in that new world, Kim had worked hard slaying mobs (with an overpowered magician girl he had found, she did most of the work), opening a business in another world (a dark elf he hired did most of the work on the business front), and generally enjoying life (by spending money to flex on his acquaintances in Korea).

Of course, he also had a sick sister with a vague disease, who he had paid for the treatment of, along with a large debt of a couple hundred thousand won that he had also paid off. What kind of Korean main character would he be if he didn't have those?

Interrupting today's important work in his office, important work being an online MOBA game that Kim was obsessed with, was his secretary entering the room. "Mister Kim, there is an urgent report from Gemeinplatz." The secretary was a dark elf, standing six and a half feet (2 meters) tall. His skin was dark, not the type of natural black color that was formed with melanin, but a deep black that resembled burnt ash. Along with his crimson eyes, Nirmal looked to be a very intimidating figure.



Kim groaned in annoyance as he had to disconnect from his match. "What is it, Nirmal? This better be something *really* important."

“There has been an incident in Casamonu, where an uprising happened in the town of Azdavay. I do not have any details on the nature or numbers of this slave uprising, but I do know that the flow of goods has been directly impacted.” He placed a sheet filled with dull financial figures on the table. “Merchants and porters have been staying inside towns and cities, along with charging higher fees, due to fearing an ambush by the fugitives. We estimate that we won’t be able to complete our deliveries in time and in the right price this season, on this sheet are a summary of the estimated effects that this’ll have on us.”

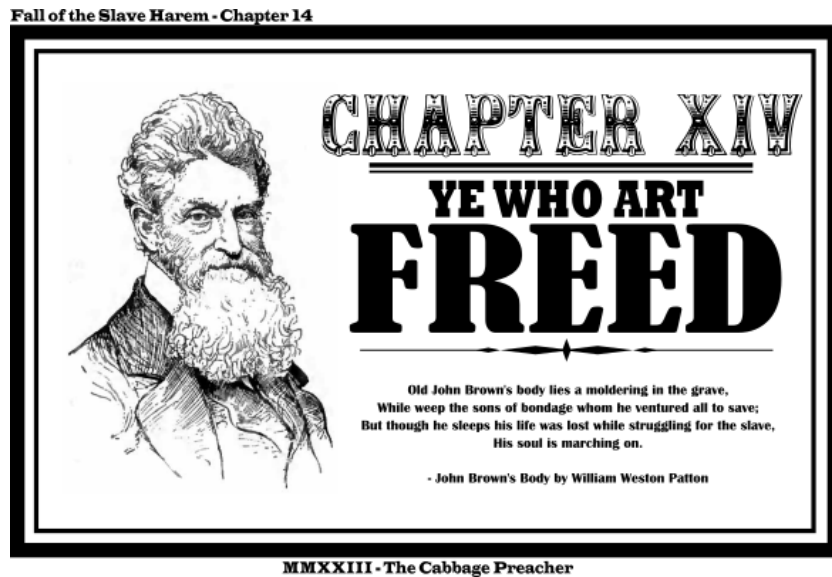
Kim was bummed at the prospect of losing profit. “So, cut to the chase. How much money are we talking about?”

Nirmal reluctantly gave the figure he had been trying to avoid giving. “A loss that sits somewhere between a hundred million to eighty million won. We’ll be losing a lot of perishable stock, not to mention having to call off deals we’ve already agreed to.”

Kim was even more bummed now. “Pay some adventurers to escort the ones complaining. If there are any more rumors of any more uprisings, then I authorize my company’s intervention.” He turned back to his computer. “Now, if you’re done, I’ll be back to pwning noobs.”

“U-Understood, sir...” Nirmal bowed down and left the room. He’d be busy tonight.

Chapter 17: Chapter XIV – Ye who art freed.



73rd of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

As summer slowly came to Casamonu, so did even more rain. The elevated position of the freemen still kept cool however, and the rain was less of a bother now that there were more hands to do work that could help mitigate the effects of rain.

Hakim and Brown were laboring in the cave during noontime. “Captain, just... yes, right yonder.” It felt surreal, to Hakim and the other observers in the cave, to see a former slave give commands to an otherworlder. The newcomers had been cautious and timid around Brown the first few days, but they had quickly grown relaxed in their interactions with the old man.

Brown had been dragging a freshly cut log that was around his height. He put the log down, and called over Ayomide who was waiting to help them. “Young lady, do your thing.”

Ayomide crouched next to the log, and put her hand over its surface. “[Wind], [Wind], [Wind]...” She scanned over the surface with her hands, drying the log that had been subject to the rain. Thankfully, casting [Wind] was much cheaper compared to disinfecting an old man’s arm, otherwise Ayomide would have ceased living by now.

After the log was dried, it was Hakim’s turn. He was physically the strongest in the group, meaning that it was up to him to cut the logs. He had only been tasked with making the firewood up until now, but Hakim and the others wanted to try something special today. “Now, Tater come help us out if you could. My back isn’t suitable for this job. Just keep this log as straight as possible while Hakim cuts it.”

Tater stood up to hold the log as requested, and Hakim slowly began cutting it into a long plank with his axe. It was a long process that took about half an hour, and the end result was a highly uneven plank that’d cause all other planks to feel shame due to being associated with it.

“This is the best we can do with what we currently have.” Brown seemed content. “A couple more of those, and we can all stop sleeping on the floor.” Sleeping on wood would probably feel much better than sleeping on stone.

Ayomide had another idea. “You know, while we were travelling to Azdavay, there were plenty of bales of straw that were left unattended. I don’t think anyone is going to notice if some straw went missing.”

“Do reckon we can get some of that straw.” Hakim seemed pleased with this idea too. “Could get even more, stuff other than straw.”

Brown didn’t seem all to pleased with the idea of stealing anything from the peasants. Still, the idea of raiding places wasn’t all to displeasing. “I think it’d be better if we didn’t anger the common people of this realm. But your suggestion did give me an idea that I think would be a more reasonable course of action.”

The people in the cave seemed intrigued. “What’d that be, captain?”

“You are all long-time inhabitants of this land, so probably know this better than I do. Are there any farms or plantations, where only slaves are made to work?” The only farming that Brown observed in Gemeinplatz were the peasants and the occasional slave that he saw in the roadside.

Tater raised his hand. “Yes, I been there, in a sugar beet plantation. Made me work as a farmhand, when I was a lil’ kid. Kept me in the shed along with the others. The master then sold me to Jacob.”

“Then instead I think it’s better if we target those sorts of plantations instead of the peasantry. Making an enemy of the people would only make our lives harder, don’t you think?”

Shinasi, who had been tasked with keeping watch from the mouth of the cave, replied. “Eh, we’re going to be looting someone either way, captain. Better to target the peasants who are closer to us. It’s just a bit of straw.”

Brown seemed a bit distraught at Shinasi’s suggestion. “But think of stuff beyond straw, young man. Think of the future, we’ll need the populace to support us if we intend to enact any sort of liberation. ‘Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth’, it is better if we are kind to the meek.”

For everyone in the room except Brown, the prospect of a full-on rebellion or revolution seemed as distant to them as Earth. Ayomide also raised a point that the former slaves had been considering themselves. “Ain’t those peasants lightskins? They’d enslave us like any other if they had the money to, they don’t seem ‘meek’ to me. I think it is more than fair if we take a bit of straw from them.”

Brown seemed offended at Ayomide’s remarks. “Yet, aren’t those peasants meek and oppressed under their lords? Am I not an otherworlder and a ‘lightskin’, am I to enslave you like you say so? Directing your anger and desire for revenge against the peasants, and not those who lead them and crush you and them under their boot, is a grave mistake, young lady. We’re making war on slavery, a system, and not on any men.”

He ended his short yet fervent speech not with Bible quote but a quote from Philip Doddridge’s *The Rise and Progress of Religion in the Soul*. “He is a barbarian, and deserves not to be called a man,

who can look upon the sorrows of his fellow-creatures without drawing out his soul unto them, and wishing, at least, that it were in the power of his hand to help them.”

“I...” Ayomide and the others, while being touched by Brown’s heartfelt speech, weren’t exactly convinced. “I thought we were going to fight the slavers? What’s this about the peasants?”

“Yes, and the peasants live another kind of slavery under their lords. One who lives under a lord, other than the Lord, also lives under a form of slavery in material and in mind. I know not and cannot know what you, or ye, truly fight for, but I myself fight for all of God’s Creation and that Creation includes all of humanity.”

Hakim also intervened in this discussion. “side from that, we escaped from Azdavay recently. I think they’d be on high alert.” This point seems to have convinced the others more than Brown’s words that no one really got. “It’d be better to attack the plantations. Raise your hands if you wanna go with that.”

Everyone in the room raised their hands, showing that they had come to a consensus after arguing.

“Well then, we’d better get ready gentlemen... and young lady.” Brown was ready to go back to doing his thing (of fighting slavers). “Then I think we better get ourselves armed and ready.” They had been too busy with settling down to the cave and gathering supplies for the newcomers. “We also need to scout out these plantations, and find out where they are.”

“I can help with that.” said Shinasi. “There have been a couple of times where I had to deal with monsters threatening these places. Most of them are somewhere up the Tilia Stream, I vaguely remember where they’re located. Shouldn’t be too hard to spot these plantations.” He raised his spear. “I don’t need to be training much for combat, anyways.”

“I’d like to join you.” Tater stood up and pointed to himself. “Those siddity folk ain’t gonna suspect an adventurer and a darkskin. I can pretend to be your hand.”

“Alright, then Shinasi and Tater shall be on their way to find us a good plantation or two. The rest of us, me, Hakim and Ayomide, should be busy preparing weapons for ourselves and any slaves that we rescue.” Brown was pleased of this arrangement and his team’s initiative. He smiled as he clapped his hands together to signal that they should be getting into action. “Now, let us get ready to fight the Devil with fire!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

It was night, after their big decision. Ayomide was a equally worried and excited, making for a hellish mix that prevented her from catching one wink of sleep. She had decided to get a whiff of fresh air, hoping to calm her nerves.

Ayomide sat on the clifftop, watching the stars. She knew not that they were just giant balls of hydrogen, functioning as giant fusion reactors floating in space. To someone like her, from a pre-industrial society of generic fantasy magnitudes, these bright dots in the sky were a whole lot more mysterious to something mundane like magic or dragons.

She hadn’t had much of a chance to stare at them back when she was stuffed in a shed. Ayomide wanted to stare at the stars as much as she demi-humanly could for the rest of her free life. Perhaps this ‘holy spirit’ of Brown lay on these stars, watching over the old man. That’s the most likely place such a holy spirit would rest, or so thought Ayomide.

“Oh, you’re awake too?” Ayomide turned around to find Shinasi greeting him. She wasn’t too pleased.

“Right...” The old man would probably get mad if she beat up Shinasi like she wanted to. Ayomide calculated that it wasn’t worth it. “What are you doing here, looking for fugitives?”

“That was just a one-time job that the old man, another one who’s not the captain, coerced me into doing. I haven’t actually caught any slaves in my life.”

“You were pretty close to catching one. I was under the bear pelt when you first visited Brown.” added Ayomide sarcastically. “I’d be dead, and you probably wouldn’t care.”

“That’s all a ‘probably’. I didn’t catch anyone and I’m grateful for that.” Shinasi sat down next to Ayomide. “‘Blessed the merciful are, they will obtain mercy too.’, or something like that. That’s something the old man said, anyways. We’re on the same boat now anyways, I don’t think I can ever safely return to Azdavay.” He extended his hand toward Ayomide. “So, truce?”

“Fine... For the sake of the old man.” Ayomide reluctantly shook hands with Shinasi, Awmereighkan style. “There’s something I’ve always been wondering, what got you to help Brown during the uprising?” She had heard all about the uprising in Azdavay already.

Shinasi looked far away as he reminisced. “Well, you see, my mom and dad worked as porters in the Casamonu. We never had anything more than a few libra in my life while all those nobles and merchants they worked for lived in their mansions without breaking any of their backs. I was very young when I kind of realized...” he made a stomping motion to emphasize his point “...that slaves, darkskins and lightskins are all equal under the boots of those higher up than us. My parents weren’t much different than the slaves; they either worked or died, and die they eventually did.”

Ayomide scoffed. “At least you had parents and a few libra to your name.” She did have something serious to add after a moment of deliberation. “Though, I guess we do have common enemies to fight.”

“Well, I didn’t say my situation was exactly the same as yours.” Shinasi paused for a moment, as if gathering courage to speak further. “Oh, and there was something else that inspired me.” Shinasi was playing around with something in his pocket while talking. “While we were walking to Azdavay with Brown, a fugitive came and saved our life when we were ambushed by a weaponnapper. A- And I though she looked pretty beautiful and cool while doing it...” Shinasi took out the object he had been playing with in his pocket: a red ribbon. He looked pretty nervous while he continued to speak. “I- And... I thought that it’d- I’d give her this if I ever saw her again.”

Ayomide tilted her head in confusion. *Does he not know that it was me? Why does he look so nervous?* She decided to clear up this misunderstanding. “You know, the one-”

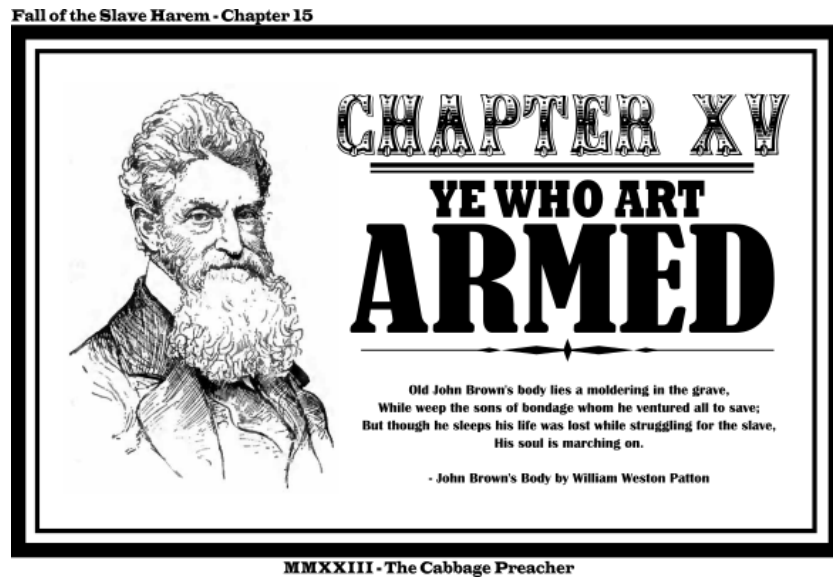
“Yeah, yeah... I- What a coincidence it’d be if I ever got to m-meet her again, right?” He laughed in a manner that was obviously fake. Ayomide could easily see the man’s face lose any semblance of composure. “A- Anyways, I- I’ll go to sleep now, goodnight!” Shinasi had lost his cool, Ayomide could easily see the young man’s flushed face in the dark. He finished the sentences with lightning speed and got up to go God-knows-where.

“Wait, you forgot this!” Ayomide now held the ribbon, which Shinasi had dropped in flight. He had already disappeared far away.

...was this an attempt at courtship?

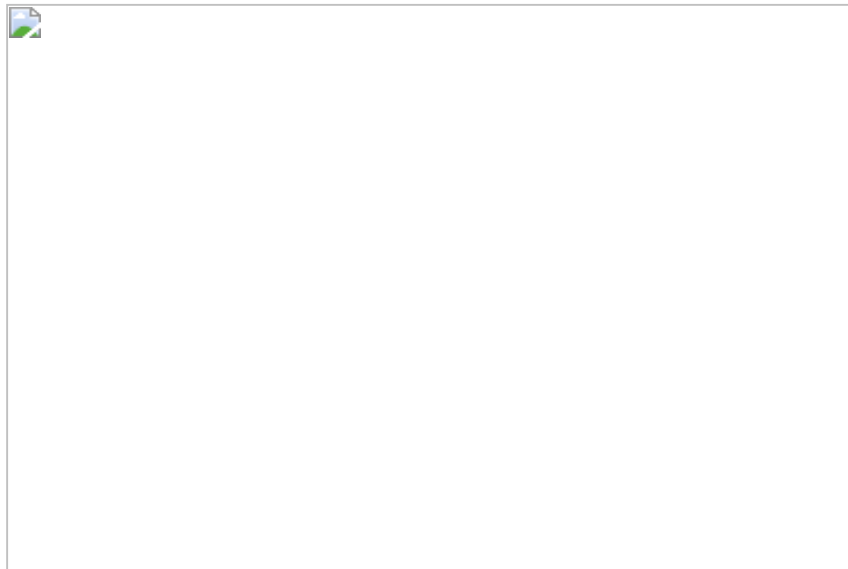
Ayomide had no romantic experience whatsoever, but one didn't need keen eyes to see the obvious.

Chapter 18: Chapter XV – Ye who art armed.



Brown, Ayomide and Hakim were currently busy in the forest outside of Azdavay, looking for wood that could be converted into weaponry.

“Captain! I have great news!” The one shouting with great excitement was Hakim, who was holding a bundle of plants which looked very similar to the cattails that Brown had seen back in the wetlands of America. He also carried a couple of chestnuts in his pockets.



A chef like Hakim could separate the rest of the forest from the trees. He had just stumbled upon a small lake formed from the constant rain, where these cattail-like plants had grown.

“Is that food that’s not slime?” Ayomide was the one who was intrigued the greatest by the introduction of these new plants.

“Yes, it is. These are ‘shepherd reeds’, that’s what they were called in my hometown.” Hakim peeled the rind off of two of the plants and handed them over to Brown and Ayomide. “Try them out, you can eat them raw.” He then peeled himself a shepherd reed to eat with the others. The white core of the plant tasted similar to asparagus. Eating it raw definitely wasn’t the tastiest thing, but it tasted like the clouds of Heaven to Ayomide who had only consumed slime for almost an entire season.

“And we can... Actually, I’ll leave what I can do with the rest as a surprise for later.” Hakim looked full of excitement as he examined the reeds he had harvested. “These the best during late spring, we arrived at the perfect time.” He’d definitely be back in the forest for another harvest.

“Actually, couldn’t we just use these plants as straw?” said Ayomide upon examining the reeds. “Get rid of the heads, and we can easily lie on them I’d think.”

“I reckon. The straw from these plants were also made into hats and other stuff back in my hometown. I don’t know how they did it, I was young when I got separated.” Hakim secured his bundle of shepherd reeds with his hands, and looked at Brown and Ayomide. “So, you found good sticks?”

Brown nodded. “I think these should be enough. Let’s go back then.” He and Ayomide were carrying a bundle of wood in their hands. Brown was also carrying, in his pockets and a knapsack that had been taken from Jacob, small stones he had found along the road. “Ayomide?”

“R-Right. Let’s go.” Ayomide turned back to face the path to the cave, and the others followed.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



While Brown and co were busy with reeds and wood, Shinasi and Tater were exploring the mountain path.

Captain Brown and Shinasi had only headed the path between Curry toward Azdavay, he hadn’t had the chance to go up the Curry path it to see what lay there. So, they had decided that they’d first survey their immediate area first, before beginning their journey to survey the faraway plantations.

The mountains were largely peaceful, like any area near human habitation. The residents of Azdavay had long cleared anything scary like dragons or wyverns. All that was left were man-bears, man-wolves (not to be confused with werewolves) and generic slimes, who Shinasi could take on his own with his spear and pavis. Young Tater only had a combat knife to his name, he hoped that he would soon get a new weapon for himself when the team back at the cave got to crafting them.

“‘Tis cold, isn’t it, mister?” Tater, and the rest of the former slaves, only had rags to their name. Thankfully, Brown had let Tater borrow his coat for this expedition.

“Mm. Totally... Yeah.” Shinasi seemed to be more focused on staring at the sky and contemplating idly, which was unusual for a former adventurer like him.

Thinking was not for adventurers, or so thought Tater who had only heard of adventurers through random tidbits. “What got you think so hard?”

“It’s adult business, my boy.”

“Adult business?” Tater quickly went through his mental list of what constituted as ‘adult business’. “Booze?”

“No- I mean, yeah... lack of drink is a problem. Right now, it’s not that.” Shinasi hadn’t had anything to drink since he had escaped Azdavay.

“Uhm... crippling debt?”

“That *was* a problem. However, I have the *slightest* hunch that the debt collectors might not want to visit a cave full of fugitive slaves.”

“Then... love?” This was his last. Tater had exhausted his list of ‘adult business’ that didn’t involve his juvenile ideas about acts of interhuman copulation.

Shinasi instinctively turned his head away from Tater to avoid his gaze. “Y-yeah, it’s totally not that either. *Nuh-uh*.”

Shinasi’s love life had caught the interest of Tater. Such topics seemed like they were of utmost importance for a young boy like him. “Mister, who’s the special one?” He poked Shinasi mischievously, hoping to drag out an answer.

“Oh, shut up.” Shinasi continued avoiding the relentless psychological attacks from Tater as the duo marched on the road. They hadn’t seen anything interesting, until they came upon a small village, actually a large estate housing an open mining field, in the mountains.

“I think this is one of the copper mining villages.” commented Shinasi. “Plenty of copper up in these mountains.” The Curry Mountain was famous in Gemeinplatz for its bountiful veins of copper, and the towns in Casamonu were famous for manufacturing goods from this copper.

“So, this where they got the stuff they make our pots out of.” Tater’s eyes were fixed on a line of slaves carrying pickaxes who were coming out of a wooden shack next to the mine. They were flanked by two overseers holding whips and carrying swords.

It wasn't a plantation, but these mines did fill the critical criteria of 'having lots of slaves' "We found the kind of thing the old man's looking for."

"Think we did. Let's give them a greeting, shall we?"

"Right." Shinasi and Tater kept marching on, until they were in range to speak with the overseers. "Top of the morning to you, gentlemen."

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

The trio of Brown, Ayomide and Hakim had returned back to the cave. They quickly got to work, each of them holding a kitchen knife (courtesy of the late Jacob) and the items that they had foraged.

Brown and Ayomide were doing their best to carve shafts out of the sticks, which was a painful process as they both weren't experienced with carving of any kind. Meanwhile, Hakim was preparing the shepherd reeds for culinary use by peeling the rinds and cutting them off from the strawy bits. He wasn't doing this just to make food; the straw would be useful as rope for the makeshift weaponry.

After an hour or two, Brown and Ayomide had constructed shafts of acceptable quality. Now came the experimental part. Brown had been carrying large stones he had foraged during their travels. Both of them also had cut small pieces of wood, around ten inches (30 cm) long, to use as a hammer for shaping the stones.

This wasn't an exact science; this was just what the people in the cave had come up with after a long brainstorming session.

They spent some time, knapping the stones, trying to find out which were hard and which were soft. Eventually, after another ten minutes of experimentation, Brown and Ayomide had a good idea as to the characteristics of the stones they had. Then they began knapping the stones, slowly carving a vaguely spear-like shape. After enough knapping, they used the small wood hammers to carve smaller, more intricate chips off the stone. To finish it all off, they scraped these spearheads to the floors of the cave to polish them the best as they could.

Now the only thing left was to put up the finishing touches. They took the straw that Hakim had prepared in the meanwhile, and they attempted to use the straw to bind the spearheads with the wooden shaft. The first one to do this successfully was Ayomide, who now had a complete spear. Then followed Brown in success, who happily looked upon the fruits of their labor.

Today, on the 74th of Spring 5859, John Brown and Ayomide had entered the Stone Age.

"You know, I bet I can make an axe or something with this." Ayomide seemed to be enjoying knapping. She put her newly spear aside to tinker with stone.

Brown, who was now a couple days off of being exactly sixty years old at this point, couldn't stand long sessions of sitting down and working. He stood up, to take a break, and to observe what Hakim was up to.

Hakim had been occupied with further processing the shepherd reeds. His job hadn't been done when he had peeled the rinds off the cores, he intended to use every part of the plant. He was

grinding the starchy roots of the plant with a large rock, which produced flour. This grinding process was largely done by the time Brown had come to the scene.

“Ah, captain. Could you hand me one of your spears?”

Brown didn't know why Hakim needed a spear for cooking, but he obliged and handed the man one of the newly crafted spears. Hakim proceeded to dump the flour he had made into a pot filled with a thin layer of slime and plants unknown to Brown. To Brown's surprise, Hakim began violently beating the mixture in the pot with the shaft of the spear. The mixture eventually coalesced into a solid lump with a consistency similar to soft rice cake.

“Sorry for dirtying your shaft, captain.” Hakim gave back the slime-stained shaft to Brown. “These ‘spear cakes’ could be useful as provisions. They won't rot easily, and their taste is better than pure slime slop.” He picked a lump for himself, and handed Brown another.

“Thank our Heavenly Father for providing us with this meal.” Brown obliged by biting a lump out of this strange spear cake. “Mmm... They have quite the minty taste.”

“It's just a bit of this-and-that from the forest to get that mint taste. Even troops on the march could cook this without extra effort, I reckon. Living off the land, and all that.”

Ayomide was about to request some of the spear cake, before she was rudely interrupted by Shinasi and Tater entering the cave. “Captain, we have some good news.”

“Welcome back, young men. What'd your good news be?” Brown was ready for some good news, being stuck on a mountain did that to a man.

“You see, Tater and I found a copper mining village up on the road. It's pretty close to where we are.” He pointed to the vague direction of the village. “Just up there. It's lightly guarded, just some overseers for the slaves and nothing much more.”

Ayomide raised her brow. “Wait, weren't we going for plantations?”

“It don't matter, do it?” The one to reply was Tater. “There're plenty of slaves, and plenty of loot up in copper land.”

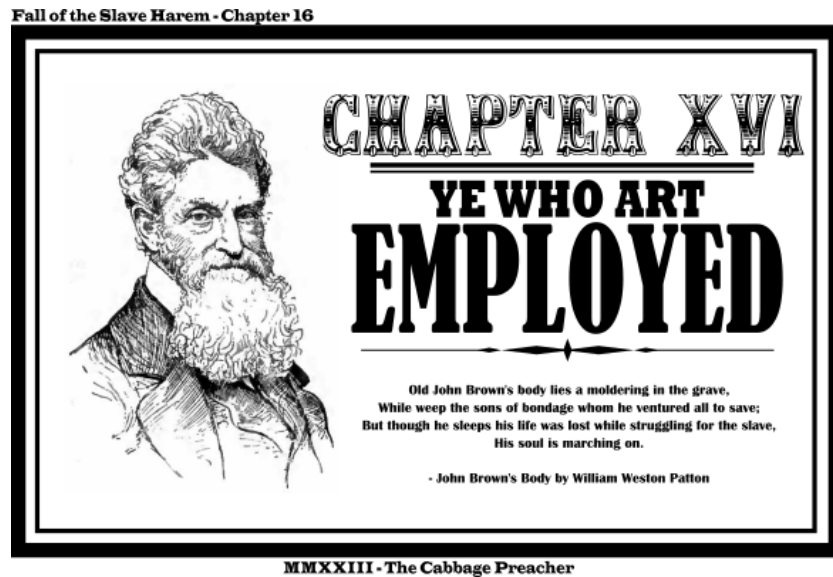
“As the boy says. I of course don't have a full account of what they have, but one's gotta assume that they'd not have nothing. Not to mention, they hired me as a temporary guard after I told them that I was an adventurer. Apparently, they're scared by the uprising in Azdavay.”

“Good thing we started on the spears then.” Brown looked at Ayomide. “We'll have to work extra, young lady, to get arms for us and the slaves as soon as possible.”

Hakim interjected “And food as well, we need to have food for when they're at our cave.”

“Then it seems we're at a consensus.” Brown was excited to get back to doing what he did best. “Our first target for liberation shall be the copper mine!”

Chapter 19: Chapter XVI – Ye who art employed.



“Ahh... That feels good... Right there, right there... Ooh... Thank the Lord...”

“Old man, could you be a bit quieter while I’m doing it?”

It was right after bath time, and Ayomide was busy with drying everybody’s hair as usual. “[Wind], [Wind], [Wind]...” A lack of towels and hairdryers made her magic essential in making sure nobody got a cold. The wind also doubled as a sort of massage, which was why old man Brown was making those odd noises of pleasure as written above.

Tater, who had been the first one to get his hair dried, was watching the two while he himself was trying to light a fire for the night. It wasn’t an easy process, he had to strike a steel kitchen knife to a piece of flint in hopes that the kindling would catch fire, which it sometimes refused to do. “Lady Orange, can’t you cast some fire for poor old me?”

Ayomide answered without thinking. “No, I cannot.”

“Why not? Ain’t you a magician? I thought you could do all kinds of stuff.” Tater had heard tales of magicians committing many wondrous acts, yet Ayomide’s job of being a glorified drying machine seemed too ordinary.

Tater’s question had ignited Brown’s curiosity as well. “I’ve been wondering the same thing, young lady.”

The old man’s encounter and reckoning with ‘magic’ had not been easy, ‘thou shalt not suffer a witch to live’ made it pretty clear what the Lord thought about magicians. However, the ‘magic’ of Gemeinplatz didn’t have much to do with acts of magic mentioned in the Bible. Brown had concluded that this ‘magic’ was most likely a highly malleable, misnamed natural force of some sort (which could be used benevolently or malevolently like any other force) that hadn’t been present back on Earth. Thus, he himself avoided using the word ‘magic’, though he hadn’t yet found any other word to replace it.

“Right... I got taught this stuff by an old lady around ten years ago, so take this with a grain of salt.” She wasn’t exactly the best authority to give the obligatory exposition on magic, but Ayomide would have to give it a shot. “So, the world is apparently made of seven elements. Earth, water, air, fire, aether, light and dark.”

“I know earth, water, air, fire and aether to be elements, young lady, as devised by Aristotle. What might be the other two?” Brown had died around the time when the atomic theory was slowly gaining mainstream acceptance. The four (plus one, aether) elements were the best that Brown, an avid reader of the classics, had in terms of knowledge in physics.

“Right. The names of the other elements explain themselves. Light is, well, light. You know, the stuff that gives life to plants and animals, hence healing stuff is in the domain of light. Like what I did with the old man’s arm. And dark is, dark. The opposite of light. Disease, death, mind control, all that stuff.” Ayomide scratched her head, trying to think of more couth ways to elaborate on the elements. “Well, as I said, I heard about it all when I was a kid. So that’s all I’ve got on the elements.”

Tater seemed unsatisfied. “So, what’s that got to do with you being unable to light a fire?”

“I was getting to that point, kid. So, with this magic stuff, everybody’s attuned to different elements at different levels. That’s why you see different folks casting different things. Far as I’ve seen, I’m attuned to wind and light.”

“Interesting...” Brown’s mind was more at ease. It seemed that this ‘magic’ didn’t have any relation anything ungodly like the Devil himself or any other demons. A question popped up in his relaxed mind. “And why do you have to shout ‘wind’ every time you need to blow wind?”

“You don’t actually have to shout anything. Watch.” Ayomide paused, thinking really hard. *Wind, wind, uhh... Let there be wind. Wind, wind, wind... [Wind]!* A sudden breeze blew towards Brown’s face. “You need to envision what you want to bring forth. Shouting what you want to do just makes it easier.”

“We have to be careful around people then. Just gagging them might not do the job.” Brown seemed satisfied as he got up. “It’s getting late. You know what they say...”

Tater finished Brown’s sentence. “...early to bed, early to rise, makes a man healthy, wealthy and wise. We don’t need to hear it for the umpteenth time, captain.”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

76th of Spring, 5859

A copper mine atop Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

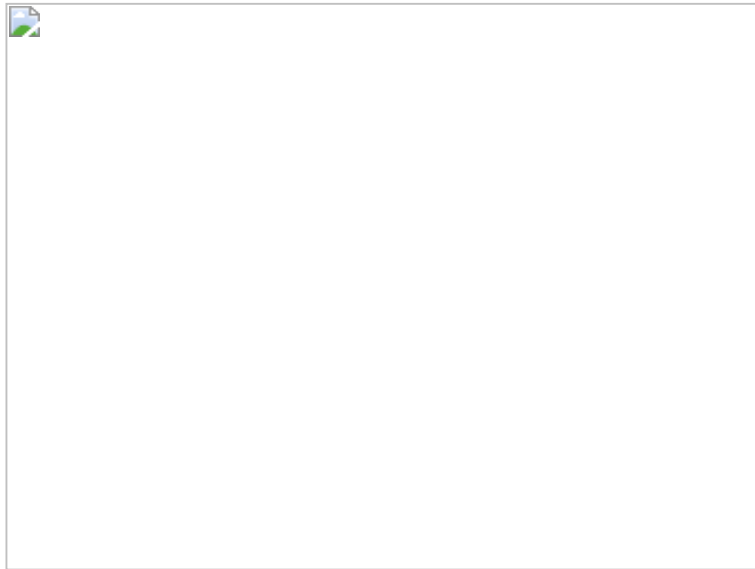
Shinasi hadn’t expected to get himself employed again this suddenly and so soon. Of course, he wasn’t going to the copper mine just to get employed, he was under Brown’s orders to scout out the facility and formulate a plan to help the slaves escape with minimal casualties.

He had gotten on the road as soon as he had bid his farewells to the people of the cave. The road from the cave to the copper mine wasn’t too long; it was only around an hour’s walk. Shinasi found himself at the mine before the sun had properly risen.

One of the overseers tipped his hat in greeting. “Good morning, Shinasi was it?”

Shinasi tipped his helmet in return. “Morning. Yes, that’d be me.”

“The boss wants to see you, before you begin working.” The overseer pointed to the biggest building in the area. “He should be in the mansion.”



Shinasi parted ways with this overseer, making his way to the door of the ‘mansion’. It was a pretty small building for a mansion, with only two floors. *Guess this is the best you can get in the mountains.* The noble who lived here probably wasn’t the richest. Shinasi proceeded to knock on the front door. He was greeted by a maid opening the door.

“I’m the new guard that Sir Algernon’s looking for.” All this formality had already made Shinasi begin to feel sick.

The maid took a disinterested look at Shinasi. “Leave your weapons at the door please.” Shinasi obliged and parted ways with his beloved spear and shield. “Come in.”

Shinasi was greeted by an indoors that, while definitely affluent, wasn’t too rich in decoration. Most of the items were made or decorated with copper, probably with the copper that had been gathered in the mine. There was even a bust of what Shinasi assumed to be the owner, he couldn’t read the inscription below it, of the mansion. The maid opened a door, wherein lay a thirtysomething in a sharp one-piece suit and bearing an even sharper mustache. Shinasi removed his helmet and held it over his chest, which was the standard way to greet a superior in Gemeinplatz. “Greetings, sir.” He even bowed down a bit to add a extra bit of sycophancy.



Sir Algernon looked pleased with the actions of Shinasi. “Welcome, I see that you are a well-bred man Shinasi. It’s rare to find such adventurers.” He gestured towards a seat that sat in front of him. “Here, you may sit down. I am Sir Algernon Satō-Wang of Curry, and this is my wife, Leila. We have two children as well, though they’re currently a bit busy being tutored upstairs.” Shinasi had missed the woman sitting on the other side of the room, he bowed down to her as well.

Leila was fanning her face with a paper fan as she spoke. “I’m happy that he seems to be different compared to the other adventurer we called up, dear.” Shinasi noticed that her abdomen was greatly swollen, signaling that she was pregnant. Her outfit was equally as sharp as Algernon’s.

Algernon nodded his head in agreement. “Indeed, I have high hopes for him.”



That’s a bit too much for a temporary worker, isn’t it... “Sir, please, you do not need to spend so many words of praise someone coming here temporarily.” Showing humility was a great way to warm up with the nobles, or that was what Shinasi had learned anyways.

“Temporary? Right, that’s what was told to you. After seeing you however, I believe you could have permanent employment. It’s hard to get good retainers up in these mountains.” Algernon switched to business mode, extending his hand toward Shinasi for a handshake. “Two libra a day,

with accommodation and food taken care of and one day break every decameron?" He was a master at blitzkrieg, his *krieg* being flattery and business.

Two libra wasn't bad, it amounted to somewhere around four loaves of bread. Shinasi didn't think too hard about it while shaking hands with Algernon however, for he wasn't here for a job. "Thank you so, *so* much sir."

"Well, let's celebrate with something to drink, shall we?" Algernon clapped his hands as loudly as he could muster. "Ekene! Ejike!"

The young maid that had greeted Shinasi at the door returned with a tray with teacups, along with a butler that looked to be her brother who carried a pot of tilia tea. Ekene, the sister, set the teacups while Ejike, the brother, began pouring tea into them without saying a word. While pouring Ejike's hand slipped and the tea from the pot flew onto Algernon's oh-so precious suit.

"What the- Damn you, dog!" The calm, businesslike demeanor of Algernon suddenly shifted to that of a savage. He was about to stand up to enact physical punishment, before Leila tugged on his suit. "Dear, be calm."

Ekene and Ejike were watching their master in fear as he went back to business mode. "Right, I probably shouldn't damage the slaves *too much*. But this is the kind of actions these uppity darkskins pull off when you don't let me tutor them properly, woman. He paused to think of a punishment that wouldn't make his wife too mad. "No food for you today. Now git!"

The siblings obliged and left the room posthaste. Algernon turned toward Shinasi to address his new employee. "You see, these darkskins are like dogs. You need to use brute force to get them to understand anything, or else they get uppity like they did just now. Don't hesitate to get physical, as long as you don't kill or permanently damage them. Got that?"

Shinasi tried his best to keep a poker face. "Yes sir." He had never seen how masters treated their slaves. Algernon's behavior seemed no different to how Shinasi had seen lords treat their underlings, to how they had treated his parents. "I'll be sure to give them a good whack if they step out of line."

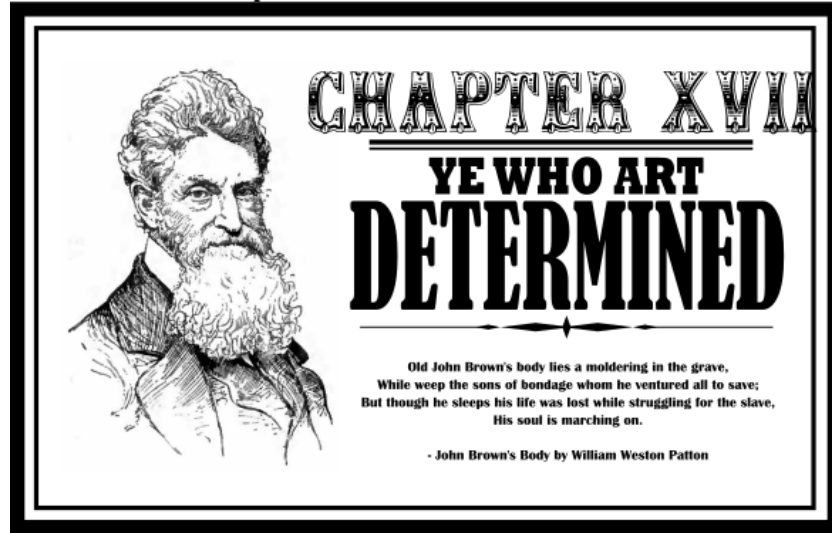
"Good, good. I think we'll get along well." Algernon smiled toward Shinasi, with genuine warmth that seemed out of place after what he had just done and ordered to be done to his slaves. He seemed to genuinely value his retainers. "You should report to the head overseer, he's the one responsible for you."

"Understood sir. I'll be taking my leave, then." Shinasi added a few more words of gratitude and flattery as he got up and left the room. His heart was weighed down by heavy emotions as he did so. He had initially joined Brown mostly on a whim, intending to escape from Azdavay. The words he spent at the night encounter with Ayomide, they were mostly points he had copied over from the captain's speech without much personal elaboration.

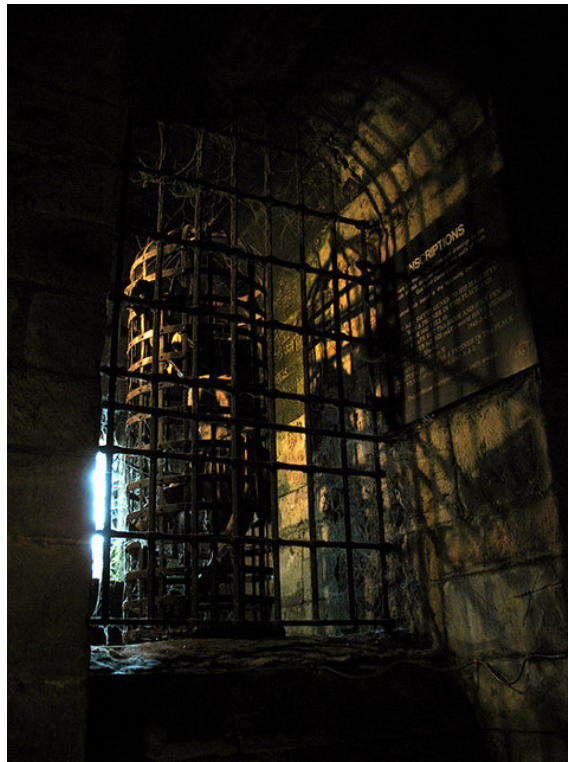
Now, however, Shinasi was slowly beginning to understand why he must do what he'd do. He made his way to the head overseer, with newfound determination slowly budding in his heart.

Chapter 20: Chapter XVII – Ye who art determined.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 17



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher



Shinasi entered a room in the basement of Algernon's mansion, in which lay a musty dungeon (not the fun RPG kind of dungeon). There were instruments meant for unsavory business, the whip and a cane, hung up on the wall. Two cells lay in this dungeon, he walked over to the one he was assigned to 'attend' to.

In this cell were the two siblings, Ekene and Ejike. Their eyes followed Shinasi with fear. Not a word, other than a few whimpers from the siblings, were exchanged between the two sides.

Shinasi spoke slowly. “The boss says that I’ll have to punish you for your impudence.” He snickered. “He says that I should get to do it so that... so that you learn to fear me. For fuck’s sake!” Shinasi leaned one the dungeon wall as if he was sick. He couldn’t really stand straight. “What type of person would actually go lock people up in a dungeon and beat them up?!” *And I had accepted to help that kind of person search for their slave!*

The siblings weren’t sure what Shinasi was up to. They watched, waiting for this odd, angry man to calm down. “You’re not going to-”

“Of course, I’m not about to do anything!” He straightened himself back again. “I’m just- You know, you don’t need to listen to me yapping. You probably need something to eat instead.” He took out, from his pockets, two small loaves of bread he had stolen during meal time. “Here you go.”

“Won’t the master get angry?” Ejike accepted the bread anyways, followed by his sister. They hadn’t eaten today, as per Algernon’s orders, so they weren’t in a position to reject food.

“Well, I’m not going to be staying here for long.” Shinasi sat on the floor, to come eye-to-eye with the siblings. “You won’t be staying here for long, if we’re successful. Have you heard of the Azdavay Uprising?”

“Yes, the big man was shouting about it.” replied Ekene. “He personally pledged one of his men to help the count with searching for the fugitives.”

There’s a search for the fugitives headed by the count? That’s good to know... “I’m with the people who organized the uprising.” *Or a few of them, anyhow.* “My comrades back at the cave will be arriving here by the early summer, and they need all the help that they can get.”

The siblings seemed rightfully hesitant. They weren’t sure if Shinasi was just toying with them by giving them false hope. There wasn’t much hope for anything left in their hearts.

“I don’t really need an answer. If you want to help, then you can do so by supporting them when the time comes.” He got up from the dungeon floor. “Just pretend that I beat you really badly, okay?” He promptly left the dungeon, having fulfilled his mission for the day.



80th of Spring, 5859
Estate of Sir Algernon, Azdavay / Casamonu

Shinasi woke up, as usual for the last four days, with the ringing of the bell at his barracks. This barracks, unlike that of the slaves, was quite spacious with enough breathing room to feel comfortable. Shinasi wasn't the only newcomer here, ten or so more people had been employed by Algernon since he had signed up.

Sir Algernon was, most correctly, worried about his slaves emulating their brethren in Azdavay. In total Shinasi counted fifteen overseers for around fifty slaves, which was a ratio that was unusually skewed to the overseer side. Thankfully Algernon seemed to be satisfied with this amount, he hadn't hired anyone for the rest of the week.

The head overseer, a fearsome man of equally fearsome physique, personally entered the barracks as he continued ringing the bell. "It's payday, line up. Line up at the yard! Quickly!"

The men didn't need much encouragement to wake up to get paid. All of them were already up, and running to get lined up at the yard. An unorderly line of was formed, overseers of slaves weren't exactly military grade, waiting to be called by name.

"Kasim! 20 libra." A man came to the front to receive his pay, which was handed over personally by the head overseer. "Melissa! 20 libra." This time a woman came to the front, receiving her pay. "Shinasi! 8 libra." Shinasi stepped forward, receiving ten coins for his efforts (of doing as little as he could for four days).

"Alright, today is holiday for the second squad. Come back by night, now git!" Thus dissolved the line of men.

Shinasi was among the second squad, comprised of the newcomers to the estate. He parted ways with his 'comrades' to meet with his comrades.



80th of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, in earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever."

...old man, your food is getting cold. Ayomide thought so as she slowly chewed her daily bread, made by Hakim from shepherd's reed flour.

Brown was continuing to pray while standing up, his head bowed down and hands clasped together. His prayer was mostly focused on asking the Lord for the salvation of his dear father, Owen Brown, the salvation of his many children who had perished back on Earth, and for the salvation of his heathen comrades on Gemeinplatz. He then pleaded the salvation of the people on Earth, on Gemeinplatz and on any other realms unknown to him that the Maker might have created before finally pleading for himself. Brown was a pro at prayer, with a brief and comprehensive style of prayer honed with years of piety. Praying for all of the aforementioned only took him two minutes.

"I would bear thy strokes, not merely because I cannot resist them, but because I love and trust in thee. I have no objection against being afflicted; against being afflicted in this particular way. Only be pleased, O Lord, to stand by me, and sometimes to grant me a favorable look in the midst of my sufferings. Amen." Brown concluded his prayer, and calmly sat down with the others to eat.

Before he could have one bite of bread however, the cave had a visitor. "Captain! I've returned." It was Shinasi, with a look of triumph mixed with that of complete exhaustion.

"Glory, hallelujah!" Brown handed his bread to Shinasi without much thought. "You must be hungry after all of that travel, young man." He was excited to see his mole come back alive.

"Thank you, captain. I have much to tell you." He began munching on the bread, which tasted no better than the food back in the Algernon Estate. Still, the blood and sweat of the enslaved tended to ruin the taste of bread, Shinasi had found out. "So, do you want me to start?"

"Of course, if you aren't too tired. Everyone, gather around!" Everyone in the cave, which was Ayomide, Hakim and Tater, gathered around Brown and Shinasi. "Now, this young man will tell us the situation in the estate..."

"...and we'll formulate a plan?" intervened Tater.

"Yes, you're a clever boy, aren't you?" Brown picked up a solid rock from the floor. He carved (in Gemeinplatzian translated to Latin script) "ESTATE MAP" on to a high point on the cave wall. Of course, nobody in the room could read what he had written, but Brown did so anyways. He had intended to begin teaching them Latin script, but the people in the cave had been too busy with the necessities of life (like food) and the necessities of emancipation (like spears).

"Oh, we're drawing a map? One second, captain." Shinasi took the stone off of Brown's hands. "I've patrolled the estate extensively, and made a map in my mind. This is how it should look like..." He made a sketch of the estate's surroundings to the best of his capabilities, which weren't much in the case of cartography. Shinasi gave the stone back to Brown, and helped him with labeling the buildings on the map.

"Now, in terms of people..." Shinasi quickly gave a summary on the number of guards and slaves. "The mining slaves sleep in the shed near the mine, and the guards sleep at the barracks with

rotating shifts. There are also two personal servants who sleep in a room of the mansion. I have made connections with those servants, keep that in mind when making your plans.”

“Excellent job, for a man like you anyways.” commented Ayomide. “What about the master of this estate? Anything we could use against him?”

“Of course, I can’t really make a judgement about a man’s character in only four days.” replied Shinasi “From what I’ve seen of Algernon, the type who’s quick to anger, especially against anyone who’s not a lightskin. His wife Leila is the only one holding him back from massacring all the slaves in a fit of anger, I feel. He also has two children, but I haven’t had any chance to interact with them.”

“Those who are quick to anger are also quick to be defeated, young man.” Brown made a notion towards the main building on the map. “Perhaps we should provoke him so that he’ll lower his defenses.”

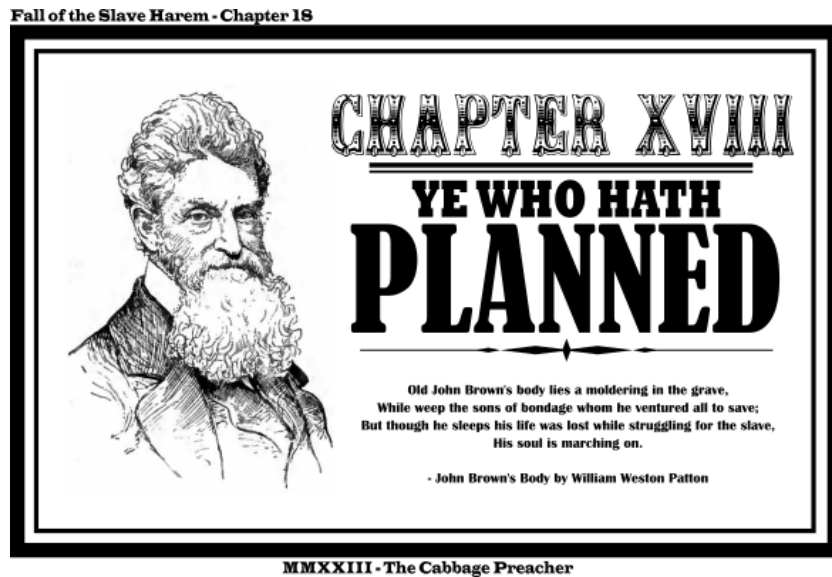
“Umm... there was a proverb about how you have to cut heads off of stuff if you wanna kill them.” Tater scratched his head trying to remember it, but gave up halfway through. “Reckon we can capture him first so that he cannot order his goons around?”

“Separate him from Leila somehow, and we have a very angry man.” said Hakim, briefly reminiscing on the untempered temper of Jacob. “Maybe the servants you mentioned could help?”

“That might be a good idea, yes.” Brown had clasped his hands together on his back, as he did when thinking. “Hmm... Ahem, let us each deliberate on our own and gather together again to finalize a plan. We needn’t be brash unless it’s the right time for brashness, and now is not.”

The people of the cave agreed on this course of action, and they dispersed to their regular duties while hatching a plan for their first raid.

Chapter 21: Chapter XVIII – Ye who hath planned.



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

82nd of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

With a plan set and ready to go, the people of the cave were working hard to prepare themselves for the big day, which would be on the last day of Spring on the 90th. The squads of the estate alternated holidays every decameron; the first squad comprised of the more experienced overseers would be on holiday that day.

The first order of business was to prepare for combat. Ideally, there would be no combat needed if everything went to plan, but it wouldn't hurt to prepare for the unideal to happen. Hakim and Tater were out in the open plateau with spears in their hands, being instructed by Brown and Ayomide.

Hakim threw a spear, twisting his arms in such an extreme manner that instead of flying up, it flew down right next to his feet. Tater had the opposite issue, where the spear flew directly up and, after almost causing another premature death for Brown by almost landing right on his head, landed at his feet.

Ayomide sighed and slapped her palm on her head (also commonly known as 'a facepalm'). "You don't need to twist your arms like that, come on." Throwing a spear wasn't exactly an exact science. "Hakim, release it a bit earlier. Tater, release it a bit later."

Hakim and Tater threw their spears again, doing their best to follow the instructions of Ayomide. Hakim managed to throw his spear horizontally, but the spear ended up tumbling in the air and spun around before hitting the ground like a harmless twig. Tater managed to throw his spear horizontally as well, but his lack of physical strength made the spear land with strength comparable to a wet towel slowly colliding with a pot made of solid mithril.

Hakim threw the spear to the ground in frustration. "It's so hard to throw these. Don't think we'll be able to get ready in eight days..." He took his axe that he had been carrying, and threw it toward a nearby tree. The axe hit the tree by the handle and dropped to the ground harmlessly, but this was still a better throw compared to a spear. "Just wish we could throw a spear like an axe."

“Throw a spear like an axe? How’d you do that, geezer?” Tater tried to imagine how such a device could work, but his brain came up with nothing. He then had an idea. “A big sling that throws spears instead of stones would work.”

“A...” Ayomide elaborated on that idea, before coming to a sudden dead end. “That’s just called a ‘bow’. We could try making bows, how hard can it be?” Ayomide looked at Brown for help. “Old man, you said that you did a lot of shooting back in your day, you should know something or another about bows.”

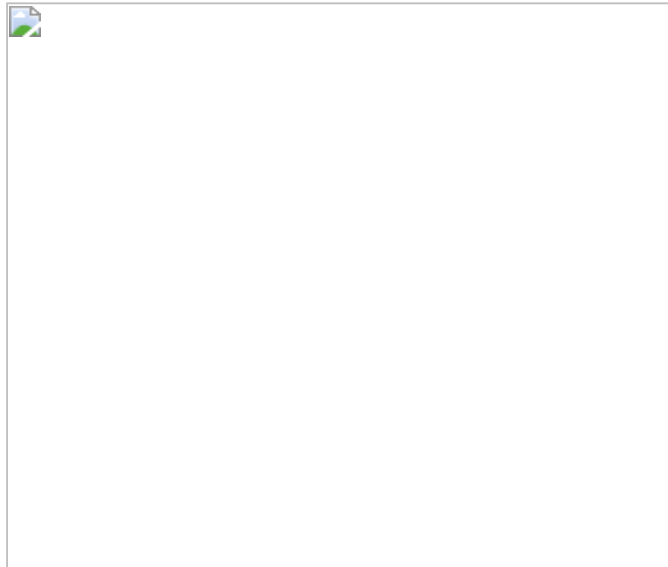
“Young lady, I’ve never held a bow or crossbow in my life.” Brown was a man of the Beecher’s Bible.

They had looted a crossbow off of the guards in Azdavay, but the usage of the crossbow was blocked by the fact that they had forgotten to loot the spanning mechanism for it. The crossbow was too heavy to be drawn by hand, so it had laid around the cave without seeing use.

“What’d you shoot then? A sling?” Ayomide was running out of ranged weaponry.

“No, a gun.” Brown motioned his hands as if he was holding one. “You held it like this, I guess the closest thing this realm has are crossbows.”

“Guns? I’ve seen some back when I was in Casamonu. They had one big cannon on the wall, and some carried small hand cannons.” Tater carried his spear as if it was a hand cannon. “They held them more like this, however.”



“Ah! I remember one as well, I think.” Hakim paused to think of the exact details. “Umm... Right, right, I once saw an adventurer visit Jacob’s shop with this weird metal tube. He called it a ‘firearm’, and Jacob rambled on about something called the ‘second amendment’ with the customer.”

“...Old man, can you make guns?” asked Ayomide with great excitement. “You must’ve seen a lot of them. Making metal tubes don’t sound that complicated.”

“Young lady, do I look like Mr. Sharps to you? Of course, I cannot construct a gun just because I used them. It’s not just a metal tube, you need the primer, the powder, the trigger mechanism...”

There's a lot to a gun."

Hakim raised his hand. "I know where to get powder! With lye and sour milk, I can easily make us some of that good, white stuff."

"We're not talking about pearlash here, Mr. Hakim. It's a different type of powder: gunpowder. However, it wouldn't be too bad if you could get us some pearlash." Pearlash (a.k.a. potassium carbonate) was used as a leavening agent; having leavened bread would be a great improvement to the quality of life in the cave instead of their current state of permanent Passover.

"...when did we begin talking about guns? Let's return to the issue at hand here." Ayomide had been staring at her spear intently after the possibility of having guns was shot down. *If spears were to be thrown like axes, huh...*

Ayomide was nothing close to an engineer, so nothing came to her mind for now. The rest of the day was spent with training which, in the end, didn't prove to be of much use.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

17 May 2023 / 82nd of Spring, 5859
Seoul, Republic of Korea

Kim Seong-Min smashed his keyboard with fury never seen before on the Korean Peninsula. He had just lost a match at the last minute. "Damn these Chinese pigs, always cheating at the game!" said Kim, ignoring the fact that he was playing on the Korean server.

Just outside his office was Nirmal, who was unsure whether he should enter or not. He had learned, in his career on Earth, that interrupting these so-called 'gamers' during a fit of rage wasn't a good idea. He had good news however, so he decided to enter in hopes that Kim would calm down.

I gently open the door, and...

"Damned Japanese, two wasn't enough..." Kim was going on a racially charged tirade that had somehow shifted focus from the Chinese to the Japanese. He had already sparked a massive flame war among the other players in the in-game international chat. It took him a good minute to finally notice Nirmal standing by the door with a giant suitcase. "Hmm? What do you want, Nirmal?"

"Sir, if it isn't too inconvenient..." Nirmal placed the pitch-black suitcase on the desk. "The items you requested have arrived. This is all we could get without being caught."

"The... Right, the items I requested to help the Satō-Wang." He wretched a bit on the inside on the mention of this surname. 'Satō' was a Japanese surname and 'Wang' was Chinese, implying that Count Leon and his family must have been the result of a close Sino-Japanese relationship. This combination was a most dreadful one for Kim, and he'd rather execute that man's entire family rather than give him one groschen. Still, business interests superseded xenophobia.

Kim opened the suitcase, finding five M1 Garand rifles neatly packed together along with boxes of .30-06 Springfield cartridges to be used with the rifles. Having firearms without authorization was highly illegal in South Korea, but Kim couldn't exactly stockpile weapons in an authorized manner. With a bit of money in the right pockets, he had imported a few 'sporting' rifles over from the United States. Of course, in this case, sport meant 'hunting fugitive slaves', they were bad for business after all. "You've got the men ready too, right?"

“Of course.” It wasn’t hard to find men capable of operating firearms in a country where conscription was mandatory. “They’ve all been briefed on the Otherworld, and they’re ready to step into the portal and go to Gemeinplatz as soon as possible.”

“Great.” Kim had the slightest hint of a smile on his face. He was happy to get back at the fugitives that had damaged his profits. “Send them over to the Count then.”

“Right away, sir.” Nirmal bowed down. “One last thing sir, I’d like to remind you that your sister’s visit to Gemeinplatz is going to be happening on Sunday.”

“Do-Yun’s coming over to Gemeinplatz so soon? Right, then delay the sending of the men until then. It’d be better if I pledged those men with her and myself present.” Kim thought that it’d be better if the Count saw the one oh-so graciously helping him out, and that it’d be good for his sister to see how far her brother had gotten. “Get me a fresh suit to wear for that occasion, from the same supplier in Milan as before.” The one thing Kim loved more than inciting flame wars was having clothing that was fire itself.

“Understood, sir.” Nirmal bowed again, and took his leave with the suitcase full of rifles. He breathed a sigh of relief when he was out of the door. It seemed that Kim hadn’t noticed anything yet. He took a disgusted look at the suitcase full of weaponry, before making his way to the corridor.

The skyline of Seoul was visible from a window in the corridor. It was night, but it was light as day no matter the hour. Nirmal stared at the sky, which had no visible stars thanks to light pollution. “My brethren... I hope that I won’t join you too soon. I still have a job to do.” He hummed a somber elven tune as nonchalantly as he could, exiting from the premises of the office.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

“And a man from Azdavay says: Hey, what are you doing escaping from here? Oh, a man from Azdavay says...” Hakim was humming a makeshift tune while preparing light snacks with Tater during the night. Brown was praying while standing in a corner as usual, and Ayomide was reviewing the map of the Algernon estate.

“Hmm...” Ayomide was predominantly occupied with the idea of a spear that could be thrown more easily. While she was able to use magic, her affinity in wind and light didn’t constitute much in terms of offense. Sure, she could speed up a shot with wind, but having a faster shot to work off of would be of tremendous help.

...*growl*. Perhaps this wasn’t the right time to think. Ayomide couldn’t resist the callings of her stomach. She headed over to Hakim. “Whatcha cooking there?”

Hakim handed small balls of cooked dough in response. “I thought that cooking flatbread in smaller pieces might make it more digestible.” He had been done with the cooking, so he turned to the chef’s assistant, Tater. “Hand me a bar of soap, won’t you?”

Tater obliged. “Here.” Hakim did his best to clean the pot using some soap and water, and Ayomide watched while eating.

Suddenly, an unwelcome visitor showed itself on the entrance of the cave. It was a naughty slime, which had wandered towards them after hearing the smell of bread.

“Shoo, piss off!” Hakim wasn’t having any of it so he instinctively used the only weapon currently in his hand: the pot. He swung the pot, and the bar of soap still resting inside of it flew out like a stone launched by a catapult. The poor slime was hit square in its non-existent face, and ran away in terror. “Another bar of the soap, please.”

“Here.” Tater handed Hakim another bar, and they immediately got back to work.

That soap flew pretty far, didn't it? The gear’s inside Ayomide’s flatbread-fueled brain began turning. *What if... What if there was a spear inside that pot instead?* She constructed what seemed to be a nonsensical sentence at first, before further deliberation on the topic began shaping something that might actually work. *It doesn't have to be a pot. Just something the spear rests on while being thrown in the same manner...*

“Yeuwrikah!” shouted Ayomide, who had heard about Archimedes’ exploits from Brown but hadn’t heard of how to properly pronounce ‘eureka’.

Hakim turned toward Ayomide, with much confusion in his expression. “Yew re-cough?”

“Don’t matter how it’s spelled, what matters is that I just had an idea!”

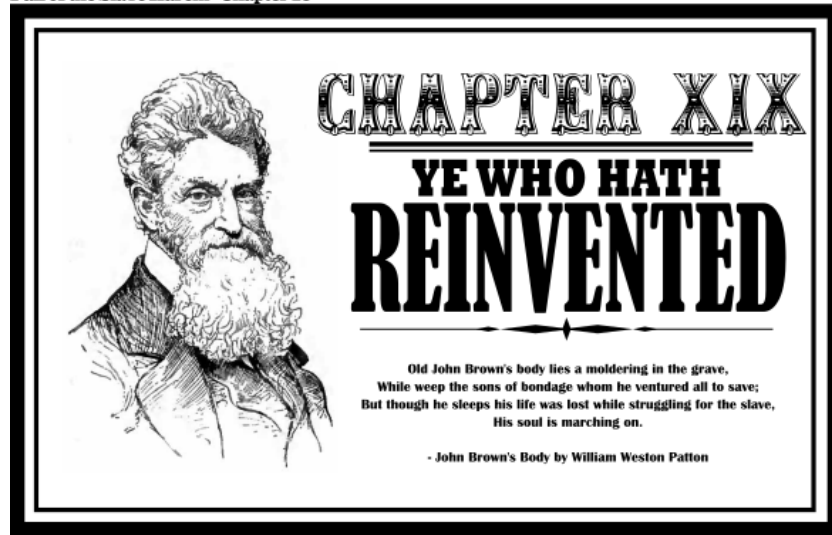
In this chapter of the John Brown Isekai:



Kim Seong-Min has got the 'unnecessary nationalism' department well-covered.
([Original post](#) by u/Blissfulss)

Chapter 22: Chapter XIX – Ye who hath (re)invented.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 19



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

84th of Spring, 5859
Mount Curry, Azdavay / Casamonu

“Soo... Do enlighten us o’ Lady Orange, what’s this?” Hakim was holding an odd device that looked like a wooden pot with a very elongated handle. “Do I throw this at the enemy? I don’t think throwing spoons is going to help much.”

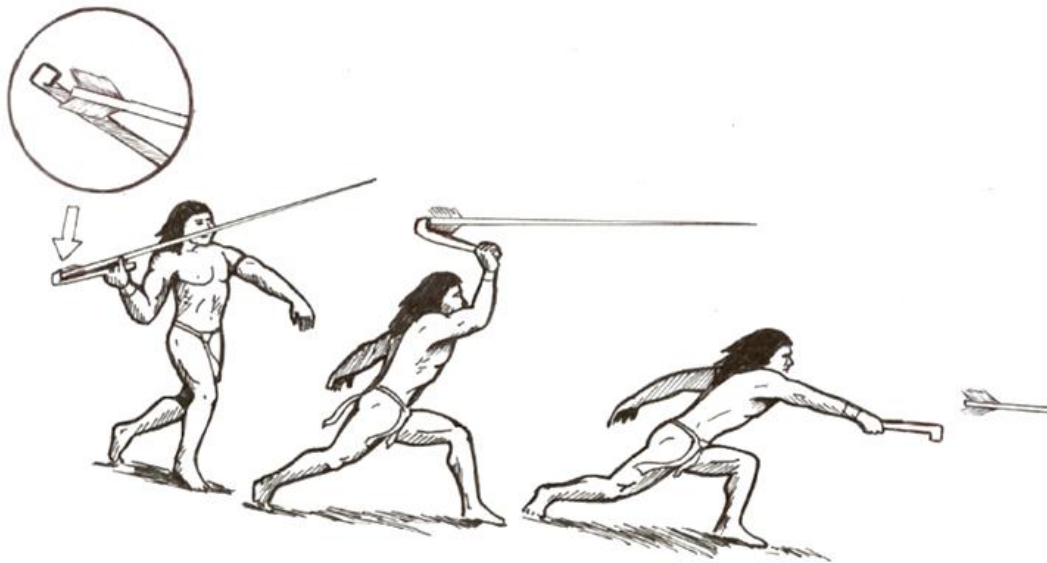


“Indeed, young lady. I appreciate your enthusiasm to the cause, and I’m sure that the Almighty is pleased with your hard work, but...” Brown scratched his head “Pray tell, what are we supposed to do with this?”

“It’s an ‘Orange Spear-Thrower M1’, or the M1 for short.” She took the M1 off of the hands of Hakim. “It’s like a pot, but instead of launching soap, it launches spears.”

Hakim’s confusion wasn’t cleared up on bit. “Pots... they don’t usually launch soap either.”

“Watch and learn.” Ayomide felt pretty cool after saying such a cliché line. She took one of the spears, and set it to stand on the ‘cup’ of the M1. Then she held the handle of the M1, while still holding on to the shaft of the spear, and swung the M1 around like how Hakim swung the pot without letting it go.



Much to Hakim's and Brown's surprise, the spear flew off in at an impressive speed of around 80 mph (~140 km/h), lodging itself into the ground over a hundred feet (30 m) away from Ayomide. "I think this pot's done quite a good job."

Brown couldn't help but clap at the performance. "Oh! May God bless you, young lady, that's excellent!"

"Can I try?" Hakim took the M1 from Ayomide, and imitated her in readying the spear. He swung it around, and the spear flew properly unlike his other tries. The only problem was the fact that he had instinctively let go of the device during launch, and the poor M1 flew along with the spear. "I guess... I could get used to it if I played around a bit more."

Tater had been watching them from afar. "Maybe we could find some bird feathers to add to the spears? You know, like arrows have. I don't know what those feathers do, but they must do something since they keep adding them."

"Well, don't matter whether we've got feathers or not." Hakim readied another spear to be thrown. "We've got something that we can make a tasty shish kebab with, that's all that matters."



21 May 2023 / 86th of Spring, 5859
Casamonu, Empire of Gemeinplatz

“I thought that you might be joking about all this ‘fantasy’ stuff, but... It’s real.”

Kim Seong-Min was taking a walk in the bustling streets of Casamonu along with his little sister, Kim Do-Yun (and his secretary, Mr. Nirmal). Flanking him were five bodyguards, all armed with the M1 Garand and an equally deadly sense of fashion.

Kim never felt this gratified in his life, turning so many heads with his designer suit and entourage of fancy bodyguards. All the time he had spent grinding dungeons and mastering the system for them felt worth it. Everyone on the street, from the paupers to the nobles, were removing their hats in salute at this impressive group of otherworlders.

A drop of sweat, formed from stress, dropped down from Do-Yun’s brow. “Wow, I’m getting a bit nervous from all the people staring at us...” She nervously laughed as she waved back at the passersby saluting them.

“Don’t worry, you get used to it.” Kim adjusted his sunglasses (bought for an amount that equaled a couple months’ minimum wage in Korea) “Besides, don’t we deserve this?”

“I guess we do.” Do-Yun continued smiling and waving “You must be very respected around here.”

“Indeed! Your brother is the richest person in all of Northern Gemeinplatz. *Ha-ha-ha!*” said Kim. He cracked a laugh that sat somewhere between evil and forced laughter. He stopped to point at a castle that sat atop a hilltop. “Look, here’s the castle of a genuine count. That’s where we’re going.”



“A count? A real one?!” Do-Yun was excited at the prospect. According to her extensive knowledge, derived from the genre of otome isekai that might not be all too familiar to some of our readers, she... didn’t know much about counts. She knew a lot about dukes, especially cold dukes from the north, but she hadn’t seen many counts.

Still, a count was like a smaller, more compact version of a duke, what could go wrong? Nothing, obviously. Maybe this’d be the start of a beautiful love story. The story of a beautiful girl from another world and the aloof count of Azdavay...

Kim and his sister hopped on a carriage that stood on the bottom of the hill, and began their ride up the spiraling road. The bodyguards marched in formation; Kim had made sure to drill them in formation marching beforehand. Everything was about prestige, after all. His bodyguards were actually a bunch of random Korean guys without actual combat experience, but to outsiders their uniforms and march made them look like elite units. A man commanding such elite units looked elite himself, obviously.

They got off the castle gates, which looked mighty tall. The rest of the castle, compared to the 3D-generated marvels that Do-Yun saw in manhwa, looked less mighty. It was a castle after all: a military building made for a military function. The walls were made of drab brick, with there being only a few walls to break the monotony of endless brick. Thankfully the castle was redeemed, in Do-Yun’s eyes, by the impressive mansion it contained within its walls.

“Is this the count’s mansion?” Do-Yun stared in awe. It was a bit smaller than she imagined it, but the mansion stood ever so grand nonetheless.

“It sure is!” Kim laughed in a most smug and boisterous fashion. “His is not that big. Mine is bigger.”

“I know. I’ve seen it multiple times.” She was referring to the Kim family’s estate, where their family had lived after Kim’s fantastic business ventures bore fruit. “And I still can’t believe the fact that I believed you got all that money for the mansion by investing in crypto.”

“It wasn’t a total lie. I sold all the Bitcoin I had bought in 2016 to fund my initial ventures into this world.” His other ventures into crypto hadn’t gone well. Eventually, even a man like Kim was able to realize a fundamental truth: one didn’t get rich by investing in crypto, one got rich by making

others invest in crypto. So, he had stopped trading, instead making plans to open an exchange operated by his own Isegye Company.

They passed the castle gates with no problem, Kim's countenance was well known around these parts, and were greeted by maids who began leading them towards the count.



Do-Yun was watching the maids with respectful intent as they travelled through the many corridors of the mansion. "They've got real maid outfits! Brother, can you get me one? I want to wear it as cosplay for a convention that's coming up..."

Kim didn't exactly want to order a maid outfit for his sister, wearing clothes of servitude weren't exactly a thing of prestige. Not to mention the fact that ordering such a thing for his own sister would feel really, *really* creepy. He was a sleazy bastard, even Kim was self-aware enough to admit that, but at least he was not a *sleazy* bastard. "I can buy you a dress that's far fancier than the daughter of the emperor himself would wear, how about something like that instead of the maid outfit? Though, maybe not too fancy as not to offend His Imperial Majesty."

"Ah? There's an emperor too?" *The emperors tend to be the most handsome ones... I'd love to meet him, along with the crown prince.* "I'd love to wear something like that to meet the emperor."

"Then I'll be commissioning one for you. The tailors in this world are pretty good, so expect something good." Kim turned around to Nirmal, who nodded to show that he was already making plans to commission the dress.

The group finally arrived in front of the most decorated room in the mansion: the door leading to the throne room. "Right this way, sir and madame." The heavy door needed one maid at each side to open, and even then, the maids struggled to open them. The hinges made a horrible creaking sound as the doors opened to reveal the grand throne room.



Count Leon was sitting on his throne at end of the room, he jumped up from his throne upon seeing his visitors. “Welcome Sir Kim. How great it is to see your presence in my throne room. Who would the fine lady next to you be?”

Kim bowed down to Leon. “Greetings, Your Excellency. This is my little sister, Kim Do-Yun.”

Do-Yun politely bowed upon seeing the count approaching him. “*Mannaseo ban'gapseumnida.*” Of course, she didn’t know any Gemeinplatzian, so she did her best by greeting him in Korean. She was slightly disappointed upon meeting Leon: he was a decently handsome man, sure, but a man in his forties was way outside of her preferences.

“Ah?” Leon cleared his throat; he hadn’t expected this sudden usage of Korean. He did his best to remember an accurate response. “*Bawn... Bawngeibduh.*” He had completely butchered the language. The count understood this by the way Kim was staring aggressively at him. “Apologies, my *Hangvuki* is a bit rusty you see...”

Kim was grinding his teeth in anger. “*A-ha-ha.* It’s no problem, Your Excellency.” He was trying his best to avoid saying anything unsavory after seeing the Korean language be butchered by the count. “Let us get to the main event.” He stepped aside to reveal his band of five merry men. “Here are the men for the Anti-Fugitive Operation.”



The count examined the soldiers carefully, making brief noises like ‘mhm’ to indicate his approval. “They’re only five men, but they seem to be of the highest quality anyone has pledged.” He pointed at the bayonets adorning the M1 Garands “Especially the blades on these spears. I’ve never seen steel like it.”

“Those are not spears, Your Excellency. They’re... hand cannons, manufactured on Earth.” He took a rifle from one of the men. “I’d like to have a demonstration, if that is not a problem.”

“Sure, Sir Kim. I could bring you a few live specimens to-”

Kim interrupted Leon as soon as he could. “No- No, that’s not necessary!” ‘Live specimens’ in this case referred to using injured and sick slaves, those who were already slated to die as healthy slaves were expensive, as target practice. Kim didn’t want his sister to see *that*, nor was he a sadistic person who’d want to shoot someone else for fun. He was a sleazy bastard, not a sadistic bastard. “Just any far away target will do, let us go to the garden.”

“Of course, sir.” The group quickly marched on down to the vast personal garden of the count. There was a great, pale tree down there, which had a few bolts already stuck to it.

Kim raised his rifle, disabled its safety and appropriately sighted it to 100 yards (91 m) to shoot at the tree. Leon watched him, curious as to what enigmatic machinations the earthlings had cooked up. “Watch, Your Excellency, as I now fire eight shots at this tree in less than ten seconds.”

“Wait, eight shots in... That’s ridicu-” *Bang-bang-bang-bang-bang-bang-bang-bang, ping!*

The now emptied clip of the M1 Garand made its iconic clanging noise as it was ejected on to the ground. Kim wasn’t all that impressed, the rate of fire from a semi-automatic rifle wasn’t that awe-inspiring for a modern man like him who had operated a fully automatic assault rifle before. In contrast, Leon’s jaw had dropped (literally) in observance of the machine spewing fire. He had only heard rumors of earthling weaponry before, to see one in action was something else. Leon approached the tree to see how many bullets this enigmatic device had lodged in the tree.

“...one, two, three, four, five.” He counted five bullet holes on the tree. “This is...” A very important question popped into his mind. “Can we buy these rapid hand cannons?”

“I’d love to sell these but...” Kim loaded another clip into the rifle. “...the Awmereighkan military would personally fly over from Chanakburg and annihilate us all if they caught a whiff of any native Gemeinplatzian troops using imported firearms.” He pointed at the tree, filled with bullet holes. “Those guys have an entire continent for themselves, with a massive military all armed with weapons that are far, *far* more terrifying than what you’ve seen here. This hand cannon is just an antique used by their civilians. *For recreation*. You *don’t* want to mess with them, *I* don’t want to mess with them, *nobody* wants to mess with them.” Kim was one of those overly nationalistic types, but even he had enough of a self-preservation instinct to stay away from provoking the Americans.

“...this thing is used by *civilians*?!” Leon instinctively took a few steps backwards from the rifle, afraid that he might touch it and be cursed by the Americans. “What... what has the Otherworld wrought upon us?”

Fantasy man meets fantastical weapon.

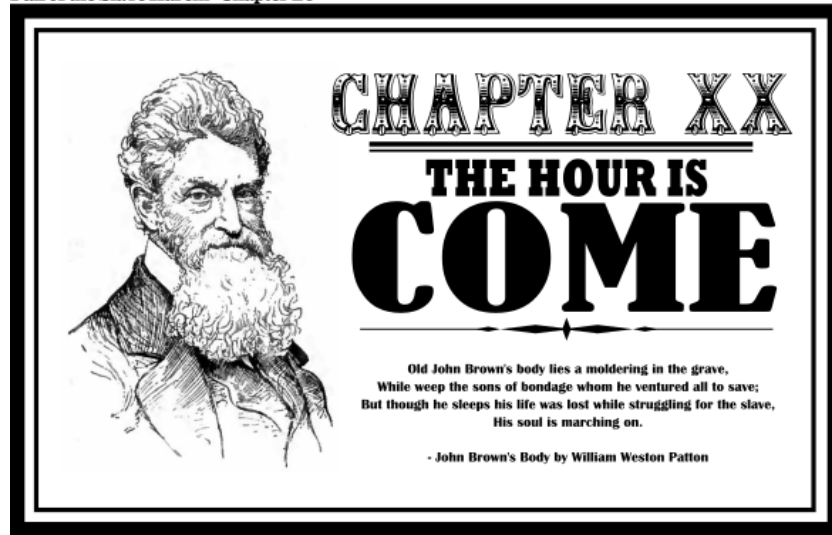
Some (non-)historical context: The weapon (re)invented by Ayomide is the [spear-thrower](#) (a.k.a. the atlatl), used by various groups of humans (on every continent Africa and Antarctica) since very early in the Stone Age. The spear-thrower acts as a lever over a long distance, increasing the energy (thus the speed and power) of the thrown spear compared to just throwing a spear by hand.



Modern earthling with a spear-thrower.

Chapter 23: Chapter XX - The hour is come.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 20



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

I had reasoned this out in my mind; there was one of two things I had a right to, liberty, or death; if I could not have one, I would have the other; for no man should take me alive; I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasted, and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.

- Harriet Tubman, as quoted in *Harriet, The Moses of Her People* (1886) by Sarah Hopkins Bradford

90th of Spring, 5859

Estate of Sir Algernon, Azdavay / Casamonu

Today was the day. It wasn't yet the time, however, as it was just the morning. Shinasi and everyone else in the barracks woke up with the bell ringing. They lined up in front of the head overseer, and he again paid them their wages.

"Today is holiday for the first squad. Now git, and come back by night!" Upon the command of the overseer, the more experienced overseers of the first squad dissolved to make their way to Azdavay or Casamonu. They disappeared from sight on their steeds, most of them had enough money to afford one, while Shinasi watched them to make sure they were gone.

Shinasi's comrades would arrive by noon. He had to work as usual until then, and today's work was patrolling the small personal garden of Lord Algernon while the slaves worked to attend it.

The garden truly was a small one, and no impressive plants grew this high up on the mountain. Shinasi encountered Ejike and Ekene trimming a hedge with a pair of scissors. They came eye-to-eye, and quickly nodded at each other in silence to ensure that they were in on the plan.

Shinasi quickly marched away from them as if he had nothing to do with the siblings, only for him to encounter another pair of siblings. They were the children of Algernon and Leila, Shinasi estimated that they were no older than ten years old. Their small garments were fancier than anything Shinasi could ever dream to lay his hands on. He felt his own disappointing pair of pants be tugged; looking down he saw that the culprit was the sister. "Hey, mister."

“Yes, Ani?” Shinasi hadn’t interacted much with the children.

“Do you want to play Awmereighkan handball with us?” Shinasi saw that Timmy, Ani’s brother, holding a leather ball shaped like a lemon. He had participated in many a handball match in his youth, and Shinasi wouldn’t say no to a way to kill time. “Sure.”

“Then our goal is between these bushes, and your goal is on the opposite bushes.” Ani backed away from Shinasi. “Let’s go!”

“Wait, now?” Before Shinasi could properly ready himself, Timmy kicked the ball toward Ani and the match started. Shinasi dropped his spear and shield, in preparation to meet the little girl kicking the ball towards his general direction. He had always thought that the game being called ‘Awmereighkan handball’ was odd when players mostly interacted with the ball using their foot.

Putting aside idle thoughts, Shinasi met his foe and easily stole the ball away from Ani thanks to him being a fully grown adult. He then kicked the ball, the ball whizzing past Timmy and stopping somewhere between the bushes, and scored his first goal. He felt oddly proud of the fact that he had beaten a pair of noble kids.

While Shinasi was busy gloating over his victory, Timmy picked up the ball and launched it toward Shinasi’s bushes, managing to score a goal. “Mister, your long, pike-like legs are no good. We’re even now!”

“Oh, you brats. It’s on!” Thus, Shinasi spent half an hour kicking the ball to-and-fro with the children. Many laughs were had, and everybody involved seemed to enjoy it until an intruder came to visit them.

“Shinasi.” The aforementioned Shinasi turned around to see his temporary employer, Sir Algernon.

Shinasi instinctively bowed down the best as he could. “Oh, I’m so sorry sir, I just-“

Algernon stopped Shinasi mid-bow. “No, no- I just wanted to say that you were doing a good job. I’ve been watching you from afar, and dare I say, you’ve done a great job at keeping these little brats occupied.” Shinasi raised himself straight, mumbling a few words of gratitude. “You know, I think you might be more suited at babysitting rather than an overseer!” Algernon laughed at his own joke and Shinasi joined with his own awkward laughter. “Sorry for interrupting you, you may continue.” He took his leave, leaving Shinasi alone with the kids.

Shinasi watched as Algernon left. *That man’s the father of these kids, isn’t he...*

“Mister?” Timmy threw the ball at Shinasi. He took it in his hands and threw it back at Timmy.

“Sorry, but I’ve got to go now.” He took his spear and shield into hand, walking away from the scene as quickly as possible. Playing with the kids he’d help potentially orphan left a bad taste in his mouth.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

“Are we there yet?” complained Tater. He, Brown, Ayomide and Hakim were marching on towards the copper mine. While they had originally planned to undertake this operation at night, it was deemed to valuable to attack during the noon when the veteran overseers were away on holiday.

Ayomide reprimanded Tater by giving him a slap on the neck. “Course we ain’t there. Be quiet!”

Tater bowed his head, keeping accordingly quiet. Their group was doing their best to travel just off the path in cover of the trees. They wanted no trouble until they reached the estate, which they had reached just now.

Brown whispered to the group. “Alright, does everyone remember what they need to do?”

“Aye.” It wasn’t hard to forget what they had been rehearsing for an entire decameron.

“Then, may God grant us victory. Skedaddle!” Brown and Ayomide were the first ones to rise up from the trees, and in a way that might seem detrimental at first, walked on the path and approached the gate of the estate. There was an overseer standing guard in a wooden shack, overseeing the path from Azdavay.

The overseer noticed Brown, who was limping while being held up by Ayomide. He had blood smeared on his pants. “Sir? Are you fine?” He left his booth and hastily approached the pair.

“Man-bears... One of them ran up and-” Brown coughed, and almost fell off the hold of Ayomide.

Ayomide was visibly struggling to carry Brown. “Sir, can you help me carry my master?” She looked at the overseer with pleading eyes. “I- I’ll do anything you ask for. Please!”

“O- Of course!” The overseer sheathed his blade, intending to help Ayomide hold Brown up.

However, Brown had a surprise in store for him. “What th-mmph!” The frail-looking old man suddenly jolted upwards with unexpected vigor and tackled the overseer, blocking his mouth with his hand. “I’m not fine, boy, for I am sick of your ilk!” He took out a long rope made of cloth he had kept from Jacob’s establishment, and gagged the man. Ayomide helped restrain him further by tightly binding his hand and feet with a rope made of shepherd’s reed’s straw.

“That was some good acting, old man.” said Ayomide as she tied the last knot on the rope. “I honestly thought that you were actually dying for a second there.”

“I pray that I won’t be dying in such a manner.” Brown looked at his pants, covered in bird blood. “Such a shame, I hope that I’ll be able to properly wash these later.” The pair carried the man back to his booth, closing the door behind him. They then waved their hands toward the rest of the group, who were still in the forest, signaling them to go through the gate for the next phase of the operation.

One overseer down, nine to go.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Meanwhile, Shinasi was busy being on breaktime. He entered a small cabin, meant for overseers taking breaks. There he saw his occasional drinking buddies, Kasim and Melissa, chatting away with each other.

“Oh, Shinasi. You on break too?” Kasim noticed the two jugs being held by Shinasi “What are those? Got us something to drink?”

“Indeed, I do.” Shinasi had spent all his newly gained 8 libras on wine. “Fine stuff imported all the way from Ancoire.”



“Ancoire wine? I’ve... heard about it.” Melissa shook her head as if she knew anything. She didn’t, the only oenophile in the group was Shinasi. “Is it a good idea to drink so much when we’re on the job?”

“Come on, the day’s already over anyways.” Shinasi placed the jugs on the table. “One is for me, share the other amongst yourselves.”

“Eh? You get one all to yourself?!” Kasim seemed annoyed at this proposition. “Come on man...”

Shinasi smirked in the smuggest manner he could conjure. “Pfft, I bet you couldn’t even last one cup.” He took two cups from a cupboard, and gave them to Kasim and Melissa. “How about a bet? If you drink your portion before I finish mine, then I’ll give each of you ten libra. If you lose, then you do the same for me.”

Kasim didn’t want to lose face, so did Melissa. “It’s on!” They poured the wine into their cups, taking a big gulp. Both felt their throats burn up, and Kasim couldn’t help but cough in pain. “What in the Otherworld is this? It’s too strong... Is this even wine?” He looked at his opponent, only too see Shinasi leisurely drinking away without any problem. Kasim did his best to not lose to Shinasi, pouring himself another cup.

After around twenty minutes of pain, the combined coalition of Kasim and Melissa had emptied their jug before Shinasi. However, they had no time to celebrate their victory. They both felt nauseous, and were seeing even seeing doubles. “Whah- whah de hewl did you make ush dreink?”

Shinasi was casually sipping away at his wine. “Well, I’ll have to tell you that grapes don’t grow much in Ancoire. They don’t make any proper wine there.” He finished his cup, and poured himself more from his jug. He continued casually nerding out. “So, ‘Ancoire wine’ usually refers to rakija around those parts, they distill it, not once but twice, from molasses that they make from locally produced sugar beets. Gives it the bitter taste you’ve just experienced. Quite a strong drink, and I made sure I got the strongest one from the market as a gift for you two. For all I know, the ones you drunk might be thrice-distilled. Imagine that!” He intended to pour himself more again, only to find his jug to be empty. “Of course, I prefer wine so I bought plain old wine imported all the way from

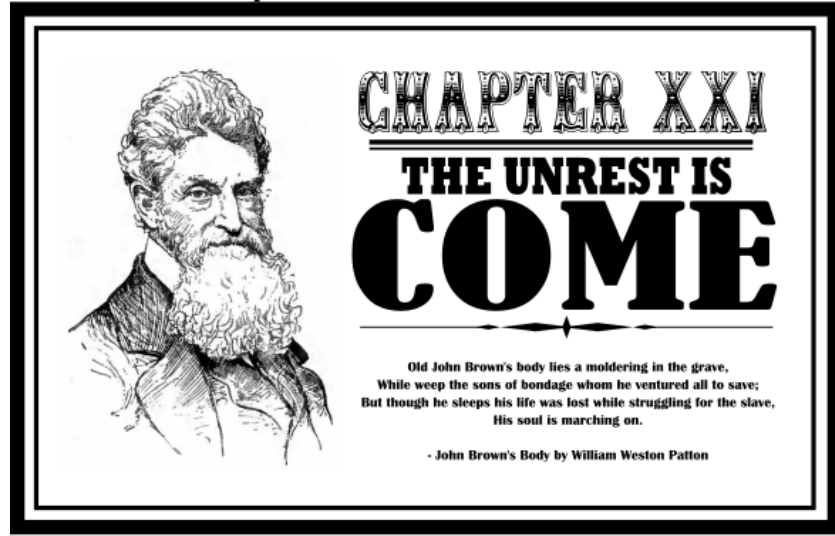
Esmira for myself... Oh, you've both gone asleep." He looked at the pair of unconscious overseers who couldn't hold the copious amount of ethanol in their system. "...I guess people tend to fall asleep when I talk about these things."

Two overseers down, seven to go.

Thus marks the beginning of the adventures of Shinasi the Wine-Assassin.

Chapter 24: Chapter XXI – The unrest is come.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 21



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher



Lady Leila was resting in her bedroom, reading a book about the wonders that laid on Earth. She was softly rocking back on forth on a chair, cozying herself by the fireside.

Today was a good day.

“On the island of *Nehoun*, carriages called the *sheenkawnsen* connect the entire island, allowing one to travel the *Nehounchin* realm in one day... How peculiar!” She turned the page to see hand-drawn illustrations of Japanese bullet trains, which looked like odd metallic snakes to her. “I

wonder if we'll ever get to see any of these..." She put her hand on her belly, thinking such thoughts of idle semi-philosophy. Earth was a place that she'd love to visit as family one day.

She lazily stretched her arms, and turned to the next page. It was one on Japanese cuisine, which contained many items that weren't too unfamiliar to anyone in Gemeinplatz. Rice, curry and soy sauce had become a staple food item long ago thanks to every otherworlder bringing their own cuisine to Gemeinplatz. She glanced over this page as it contained nothing interesting, turning over to one with Japanese sweets. These weren't too alien as well, everybody had *mochi* at least once in their lifetime.

Still, speaking (or more accurately, reading) of sweets had made Leila crave some. She would normally go to the kitchen herself to order something, doing at least that instead of calling over a servant made her feel less lazy. But, carrying around another human being made it hard to go do just that, and she instead opted to look out the window to see if there were any servants in sight.

She saw Ekene and Ejike busy in the garden, probably trimming some hedges as usual. Leila called out to them. "Ekene, Ejike! The usual, please." The siblings rushed inside in response, as they would normally do. The only thing left for Leila was to wait. She was from a family whose only claim to fame was being very far relatives of the royal line, being able to command someone to do something was a guilty pleasure of hers that satiated the royal blood coursing through her veins.

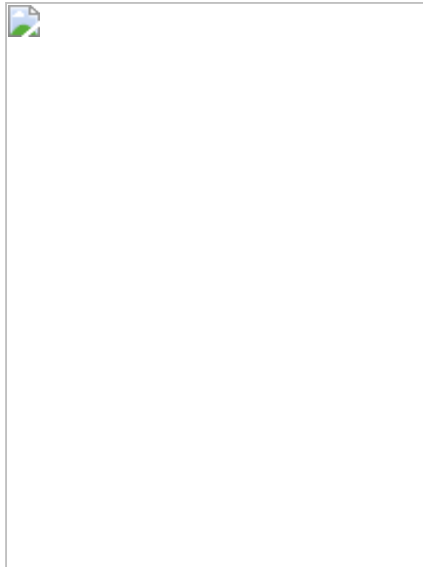
Of course, this kind of lifestyle was built off of the back of countless bodies down in the copper mine, but she liked to think of this as a civilizing force for the darkskins. She had read about how savage the darkskin and demi-human lands were, with their tribes apparently containing no rule of law compared to the oh-so civilized Gemeinplatz. Leila didn't support the heavy-handed approach her husband sometimes had, who saw the darkskins as akin to dogs. She saw them more like children, ignorant and rowdy, in desperate need of the guidance of the lightskin race.

She heard a knock on the door. "Lady Leila, it's us." It was the siblings. Ekene brought forward a cup of tea and a tray of cookies. That was unusual. Ejike stayed behind, standing next to the door. Leila felt a slight hint of unease.

Click, chunk. Ejike locked the door swiftly as he could after taking a deep breath. Leila watched him, eyes wide open. "W-what are you doing, Ejike?"

"Please, be quiet as you can, mistress. We do not intend to hurt you." In stark contrast to his statement, he took out a kitchen knife while nervously pointing it towards his former master. "Please, do *not* force us to do anything rash."

Today *was* a good day.



“Sir Algernon!” Shinasi was running fast as his legs could carry him. He found Algernon resting in his lonesome. “Your wife, she-”

Algernon suddenly ceased his relaxing posture, “She’s what?”

Shinasi took a break to catch his breath after running so quickly from the guard’s shed. “She’s... gone into labor sir! We’ve called over the midwife, everything, she wants to see her dear husband.”

“She wants to do that?” A man being in the room during birth seemed odd to him, but he didn’t see any reason not to oblige. “I’m coming, Leila!” He and Shinasi rushed over to the bedroom, both of them left panting by their swift run. Shinasi knocked on the locked door.

“It’s me, and the master!” The door quickly opened up. Algernon rushed into the room, only to find the servant siblings and his wife, who was clearly not in any sort of labor.

“What’s happen- *ARGH!*” Algernon’s query was prematurely answered by the shaft of Shinasi’s spear bashing against his kneecaps. He crashed to the floor, and the siblings rushed to restrain him.

“Damn you darkskins, and you darkskin loving motherfuc-mmrrgh!” The siblings conveniently censored their former master by shoving a tablecloth in his mouth. The once grand Algernon looked quite ridiculous while squirming on the ground.

“That’s the big cheese dealt with.” Shinasi’s eyes came into contact with those of Leila’s, who were watching him with shock. “My sincere apologies, missus, for causing so much commotion.”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

The squad of Brown, Ayomide, Hakim and Tater had quietly advanced up to the slave barracks, which lay next to the mines. There were five overseers, all armed, watching over the slaves as they dug the open field mine.

The emancipationist squad stood at a slightly higher position, mining operations tended to lower elevation, and the overseers were too busy watching over the slaves to notice them. One of the overseers stood next to the door of the barracks, while the rest were in the mining field. One of them had a crossbow, while the rest had the trusty shield and spear combo.

Everybody took a deep breath. This was potentially the deadliest part, where actual combat would take place.

Brown gulped, and began putting the group's drill into practical use. "Alright, plant spears." They used the tip of the spears to plant them on the ground, so that they could quickly pluck them when firing. "Ready arms." They put spears on the M1, and raised them ready to fire. "And... May God grant us victory, aim at the guy in front of the barracks, and fire!" Brown shouted the last order, and everyone released their spears in unison.

Two of the flying spears found their target and lodged themselves inside the overseer in front of the barracks. Not many people could stand after being skewered by spears, and this overseer was no exception. He fell down, immobilized.

Brown gave no time for the overseers to react. "Now at the guy with the crossbow, ready arms, fire!" They all fired, but missed the crossbowman standing far away. The crossbowman had broken from his shock, and fired a bolt at the emancipation squad. Hakim was hit right on the knee, and subsequently fell down as his knee failed.

"Do not fret! Ready arms, fire!" Three spears made their way toward the crossbowman, and one of them got a lucky headshot. He fell down, dead by the time he hit the ground.

The remaining three overseers got into formation, forming an impromptu shield wall against their foes. Brown ordered his men to fire another round, but the stone spears only managed to lodge themselves into the shield without penetrating them. The emancipation squad prepared themselves for tactical retreat, except for Hakim who still couldn't stand.



Suddenly, one of the overseers fell down with a pickaxe lodged in his spine. They had exposed their backs to the slaves, and one the slaves had taken advantage to throw his pick. The two remaining overseers instinctively turned around to see who attacked them.

Brown had been praying for something like this to happen. It seemed that the Almighty had granted him His grace. “Fire!” Another round of spears found themselves flying toward the overseers, one of them fell down as a spear lodged itself to his flesh.

The last remaining overseer did the most rational thing he could, and threw down his spear and shield to surrender. He was restrained by one of the slaves.

Four overseers down, three to go.

Ayomide crouched down to heal Hakim, while Brown stepped forward to address the newly emancipated. “The time is come, ye who art the enslaved of this realm. We ought to obey God rather than men, and today we shall rid you of the man you have obeyed for so long!” He turned around to Ayomide, who had finished healing Hakim by now. Brown thought that her addressing the crowd would be more appropriate, since most of his usual rhetoric didn’t work in Gemeinplatz, and she stepped forward in his stead.

Ayomide raised her voice as high as she could. She had been training her rhetorical skills as much as she trained in combat, having prepared a speech in case she needed to give one. “Brothers and sisters! You who are in bondage since birth, you who have been forced into bondage! You, the meek who shall inherit the earth of Gemeinplatz! You might have heard about the uprising in Azdavay, and let me tell you, it shall not stay an isolated incident.” She raised her hands, pointing toward the lowlands visible from their position. “For the oppressed of this land have found themselves tired and beaten, and they now cry for sweet liberty! Now the flame of uprising has made its way to this estate, and I believe that my siblings here shall do the right thing and join us in fueling the fire.”

Ayomide’s rhetoric seemed to be much more effective. There were positive shouts from the crowd, as they raised their fists and picks. Her plan of agitating the crowd had worked. “We shall fight for emancipation, not for those of you in the mine, but for all of us. The slaveowners will arm themselves and fight, we’ll drown them in our numbers. The adventurers will be paid to slay us, we’ll slay them for free. The lords will levy their men, we’ll levy ourselves without anyone telling us to where and when. We are what this empire is built upon, we only need to rise up from the foundations for the whole rotten structure to come crumbling down!”

The crowd was in a frenzy. Now that they were agitated, and therefore willing to listen, Ayomide continued on to instilling their cause into the people in the crowd. She turned around to present Hakim and Tater to the audience. “Now, my friend Hakim over here, he used to be a chef in a café down in Azdavay, Here’s his assistant, little Tater. They cooked for others without end, the most delicious and delectable food you can think of. What’d they get in return? A bunch of gruel.” The crowd sounded displeased; they could relate to such a situation. “You, you mine copper that is made into the fanciest things in all of Gemeinplatz. The emperor himself probably has his palace decked in copper, brass, bronze, everything that none of us can ever dream of even seeing. Yet, is a man not entitled to his own labor, his own copper? Do you deserve gruel for breaking your backs until you die? No, no I say, let us be free to eat the fruit of our own hard work!”

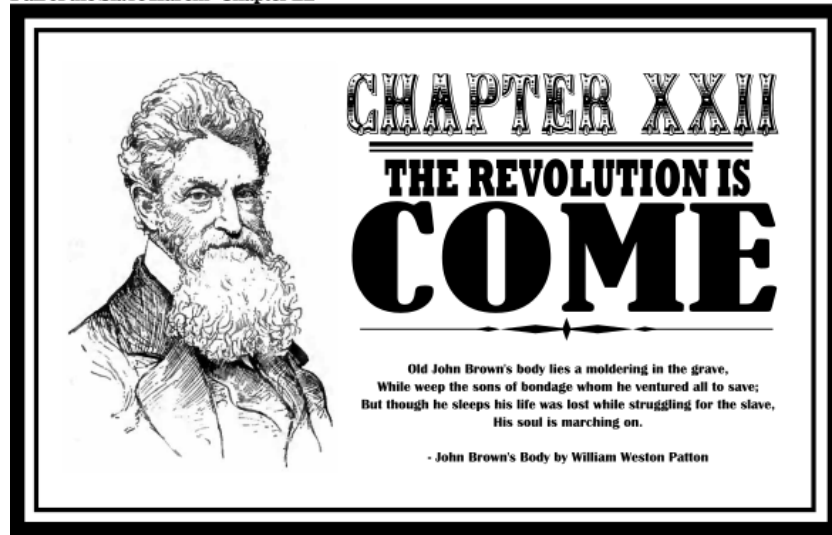
Ayomide had come to the last part of her speech. With a cause instilled, now was the time to for the grand finale: a call to action. “Now, to take back your freedom and liberty, to take back your hard work, to live and die with dignity, who is willing to fight? Who is brave enough to face poverty, war, and death with us? Those who do not have the courage, you are free to head to the dwarves in Zon’guldac. Those who do...” Ayomide added a pause here for dramatic effect “...rise up ye gallant children of Gemeinplatz! We have nothing to lose but our chains! Today, you have worked

in the mines and must be tired. Next morning, we shall get together in the mansion and discuss our plan of action together.”

Thus began a great war that'd irreversibly change an entire empire.

Chapter 25: Chapter XXII – The revolution is come.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 22



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

It was night, and like many other nights, the overseers of the first squad had drunk themselves to an inebriated stupor. The world was their oyster, and oysters went well with booze. The newcomers would deal with anything that happened anyways; they needn't worry about their own state. With incongruous speech and laughter, they were on the path back, hearts carrying no worries or fears.

This group saw Shinasi at the gate. He saluted them while furrowing his brows. "You're a bit late."

They passed Shinasi without caring about his remark, only one of them stopped to reassure him. "Thatsh you Shenasshy? Dun't wurry, we'll short thish out... wif de big head oversheer. You keap thish plaesch shecyure, mmkay?"

"Don't worry, everything is all fine and dandy around here. As safe as it could be." Shinasi turned around to address the rest of the drunken crowd. "You all, quickly go to the barracks before the head overseer notices your absence!"

Shinasi received a solitary reply. "Yer not mah father!" Still, they didn't want to be berated by their boss, so they hurried to their barracks to rest.

It was dark out, so they noticed nothing out of the ordinary like the fact that there was no one else outside or the fact that the slaves were ready, with weapons and rope in hands, and positioned inside the barracks to capture every last one of them.

Without being able to put up much, or any, resistance, the last of the overseers were captured by the freemen of the estate. The raid of Sir Algernon's Estate concluded thus, with no casualties except for a few overseers.



1st of Summer, 5859

Former Estate of Sir Algernon (new name pending), Azdavay / Casamonu

With summer came more rain, combined with rising temperatures this made summer an unbearable, humid hell for many in the lowlands of Northern Gemeinplatz. Especially those otherworlders coming from a colder and dryer climate would be unlucky to find themselves sent here at such an inconvenient time.

Thankfully, for one certain American whom was known as John Brown, he was busy being high up in the mountains where the temperatures were cool and the air was suitably dry. He watched the dawn of a new day along with his newly emancipated comrades-in-arms.

Of course, they weren't here to leisurely watch the sun rise, as beautiful as the scenery was. Brown would have loved to sit, relax, and pray away while partaking in what he saw as the Lord's majestic Creation in full display. However, there were many things to do today. These things to do started with the carrying out of heavy justice.

All of the (now former) overseers were lined up in the yard for payday, of the non-monetary kind. The freemen were crowded together into the yard as they watched their former oppressors be thrown into such a sorry state, the tension and irony in the air feeling quite palpable to everyone in the yard. Brown and Ayomide marched on, as they inspected every single one of his special guests. They reached a pile, of rope and sacks, ready to get on with their business.

"By order of the Lord Almighty, we have gathered here to right what has been made wrong." Brown took one of the ropes, tying it into a noose. He further tied this noose to a cherry tree that had failed to bloom in the cold mountains. The freemen followed, preparing a noose for everyone on death row.

"Now, to make sure that there are no miscarriages in our justice..." Brown turned around to the audience of freemen "...does the jury agree that all these people, who are lined up in front of us, are truly guilty and deserving of their punishment?"

This question was only a rhetorical one, the freemen knew the answer, though there wasn't much to trial. In front of them were those who had beat, whipped and violated them to no end. Those who'd, if successful, would see them waste away in the copper mines. Life had been made hell for them up

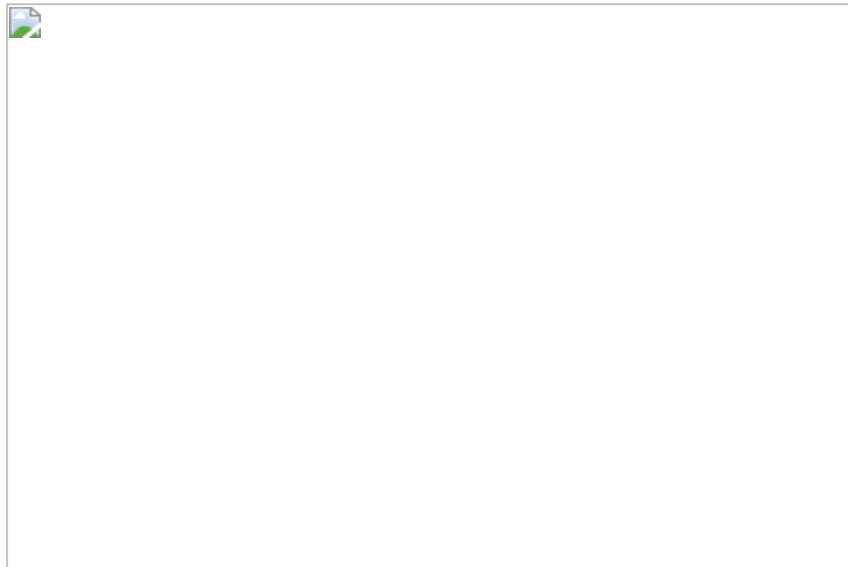
until now; the overseers had a lot to sow from what they had reaped. Hence, the response was uniform: “Yes!” The ‘trial’ of the overseers ended. They were guilty.

In an ideal world, Brown wouldn’t have to hang anyone, or fight with anyone. In his heart, he was a humanitarian man of peace who saw the aforementioned as a waste of human life. Unfortunately, Brown hadn’t been born in, and sent to, an ideal world. A man like him could only be at peace when he arrived at the Pearly Gates. “So be it... May God have mercy on your souls!”

With the command given, the crowd of slaves carried their oppressors toward the trees, and put them on boxes and chairs from the mansion. Some of the overseers were pleading, some were resisting, some had quietly accepted their fate. They were all gagged to prevent the use of magic, so not much could be heard from them.

With a harmony oft seen in orchestras, this orchestra playing the song of the oppressed, the chairs and boxes were kicked and the oppressors were left to hang.

★ FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM ★



“That’s Kasim. Bastard was the one who whipped me yesterday.” Ekene spat out the hull of a sunflower seed, quickly taking another one from a bowl. Her brother was doing the same as they watched the hangings from the second floor, where the room of the former mistress lay. The siblings were in a state of jubilee, but they were too tired from their grueling life of work to show it openly, contenting themselves with an internal feeling of alleviation.

In great contrast to the relaxed attitude of the siblings sat another pair of siblings and their mother, (soon to be not a) Lady Leila. Ani and Timmy were huddled together, while Leila was trying to assure them that everything was going to be fine (it was going to be fine, just not for their father). “He’s going to a better place now...” With how he had treated the slave however, even Leila had doubts as to whether her husband would end up in a good otherworld.

“Oh, there’s the big man.” Ejike pointed at Algernon being carried by slaves. “He’s gonna be gone in a moment now. Can’t believe it.” He spat out a hull, aiming at the balding head of Algernon. This shot somehow landed right on top of his head, though the moribund Algernon wasn’t in a state to care.

His sister attempted the same, but Ekene missed by a wide margin. “I can’t believe it either. We get to spit hulls on him all we like, and no one in sight is here to whip us.”

Ejike stopped his sister from speaking further. “Ssh! That Brown is speaking.” They could easily hear him through the window.

“Hear me, ye who art freed!” Brown stood in the middle of the crowd, Algernon in hand. This was to be the apex of the day. “The Good Book commands, ‘blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy’. I ask of you: has this man shown ye mercy? *Does* he deserve our mercy?”

The response of the crowd was united and resolute. It was a big “No!” chanted by thirty or so souls in unison.

Algernon looked shocked at this united front. His brief stint in death row had allowed him to prepare his final words. “Have I not fed you, and clothed you? Have I not given you a job, and disciplined you to the best of my ability? What is with this ungrateful mob you’ve formed?”

“And you’ve fed yourself even more, you pig!”

“I never chose to work here!”

“Stick that whip up your arse!”

Brown didn’t approve of the uncouth manner some chose to reply to Algernon, profanity was a big no-no, but he was happy to see the passionate response of the audience. “Well, Sir Algernon. I am a man of the book, and of many books. Let me give you another passage that I think all can agree on, be they Christian or heathen.” He was the only Christian in the audience, actually, but he chose to ignore that for now. “‘Do to others whatever you would like them to do to you.’ That is the Golden Rule, upon which I base my cause, and think that all should base their cause, upon.” He leaned forwards, meeting directly eye to eye with Algernon. “Now, Mr. Algernon. Be honest to yourself and God. What *have* you done?”

Algernon briefly fell silent. It was clear that there was no clear way for him to survive today. “You are trying to run a circus consisting of these sad monkeys, out of some insane idea of thinking that these dogs are equal to you. I hope that your band of savages are taken out before they cause too much damage.”

“I do agree that these people are quite sad-looking.” Brown began pushing Algernon forward toward a noose “I’m doing my part, right now, by enacting punishment on the culprit who has caused such a sad state.” One of the slaves covered Algernon’s head with a sack “There’s one savage to take out, Mister Algernon, and it is you.”

Algernon was raised up with a chair. One of his former slaves stepped forward to deal the coup-de-grâce. “May God have mercy on your poor soul!”

With Brown’s declaration, and a kick to the leg of the chair, Algernon was no more.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

...I sense a great disturbance in the force.



Up, high up on the mountains sat a dimly lit room, occupied by one lonely man. He sat with his legs crossed, hands sitting on his lap. This man was Master Long Dong of the Supreme Heavenly Immortal Taoist Sect (or the Dong Sect for short), who had been attempting to reach a breakthrough for the last ten thousand years (or so he says, he had only been locked in this room for three years).

However, something sudden had interrupted his calm meditating session. A sudden irregularity in the weave of *qi*, as if a dozen souls had been condemned to death in these mountains. He focused his mind even further, seeing images of a group of spirits rising high above to the sky. *What happened here? Sudden monster attack? Nuclear explosion? Someone making a sacrifice to some eldritch god?* There weren't many people in these mountains; so many people dying at once was most unusual.

Dong attempted to channel one of the condemned spirits. To his vision came a portly nobleman, who seemed equally distressed and furious. "The empire is falling, sir! *Gemeinplatz* will be doomed if we do not stop *them*!" He quickly floated away, the spirits of the newly deceased weren't the most stable.

Gemeinplatz falling? Dong focused even further, trying to pierce the foggy veil that laid between him and the future. This technique of seeing the future was one taught to him by Diu Nei, one of the jade beauties who he could barely remember the jaded countenance of.

Foreseeing events wasn't beyond him; to a man that had travelled a myriad realms and a centillion *li*, seeing a glimpse of the future was like seeing Mount Tai. From the simple son of a factory worker in Shandong, Dong had become something much greater with every ascension into a further realm, every realm he learned new powers that he'd forget to use in later chapters of his extremely drawn-out story. *Gemeinplatz* was just another stepping stone in his journey to defy the heavens.



After a stient of intense meditation, vague and sporadic visions of the imperial capital of Hauptstadt flooded his mind. *Those are... soldiers. Crumbling walls. Flags, people storming the walls... No these are not people. They're demi-humans, slaves, the lot. A strong, ancient presence stands behind them, commanding them... a Demon King of some sort? People are hanging. A lot of them. The emperor is dead. The empire is dead. A grueling war shall come. Thousands will die.* His head was starting to hurt at this point and, due to the absence of painkillers to relieve it, Dong had to stop this sneakpeek into the future.

One of the disciples came running into the room, completely interrupting Dong's serene state. "Master are you fine? You have been screaming for the last hour..."

Dong quickly snapped back at the disciple "Didn't tell you idiots to not run in when I'm meditating?! Yes, I'm very much fine. One tends to scream when they're looking into the future, that's a normal part of how things work, disciple."

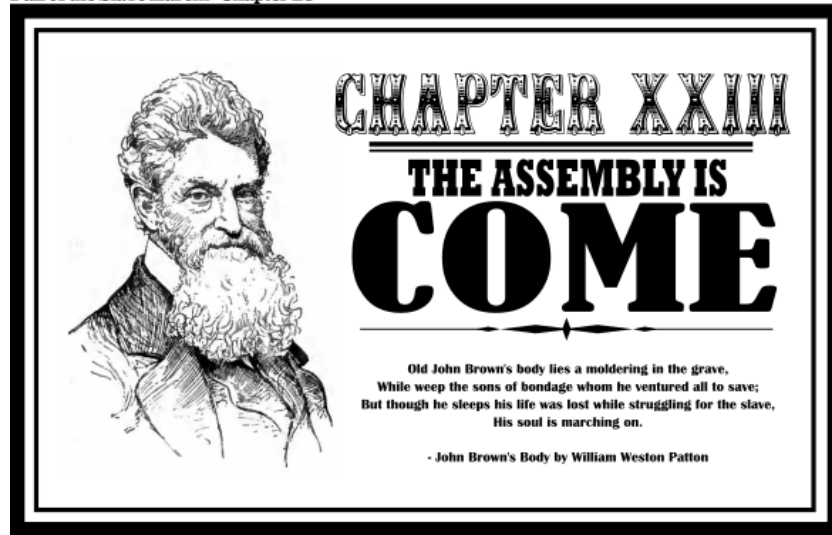
The disciple breathed a sigh of relief. "I- Is it... What have you seen, master?"

"...Terrible things." Dong slowly rose up from his seated position. "We must ready ourselves to save this realm if need be." Dong couldn't help but cackle. His pitiful sect had been stuck up here for heavens-knows how long, a heroic act could be all that he needed to win the favor of realm. Just thinking of the riches, and the jade beauties, pleased him enough.

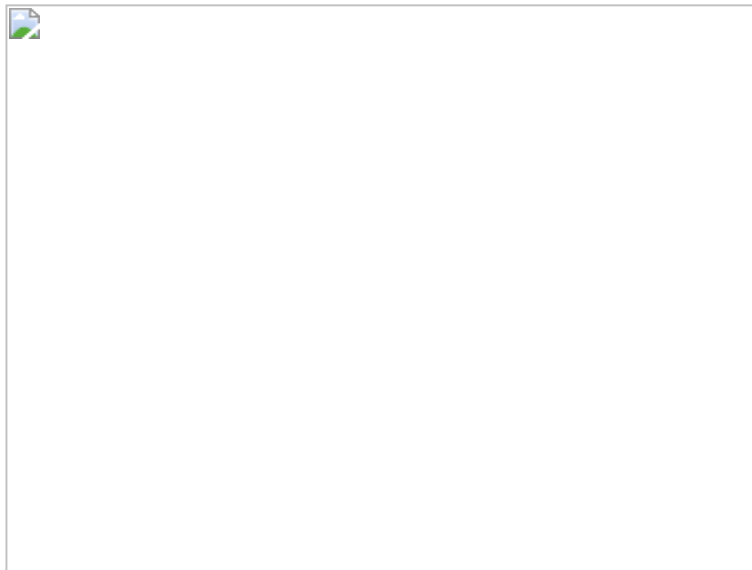
"Get everyone together. Get in contact with the local government. We shall defy fate."

Chapter 26: Chapter XXIII – The assembly is come.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 23



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher



“People! Folks! Gather around, gather around. No pushing, please.” Brown and Ayomide stood in the middle of a large crowd that had formed in the former dining room of the Algernon mansion.

After the executions and an establishment of temporary order came the time to organize the freemen. Brown’s men had already gained their favor by emancipating them, and they hoped that convincing the newly emancipated wouldn’t be too hard. The former slaves of Algernon sat at the chairs, and on the ground as there were not enough chairs, waiting for the ‘council’ to begin its session.

Brown watched as the last of the men entered the hall. “Alright, I think we’re settled. In the name of our Lord, and our Savior...” He looked around to see if everyone was present “...we hereby declare the Eleventh Session of the Provisional Council of Curry to be in session!”

“...the what?” One of the newly freed men voiced an opinion that mirrored many in the room.

Ayomide was tasked with an explanation that wasn't too alien, for Brown tended to go on long rants about 'the Constitution' and 'man's God given right to liberty' that weren't too popular. "Basically, instead of getting one leader to decide things for us and order us around, we do things..." *What was that word again...* "...dehmokraktikellie. Like how they do things in town halls, and..." Ayomide continued on with her explanation on democratic institutions until she felt that the crowd was educated enough. "...so, let us begin."

There was a murmur travelling among the freemen. It stopped as a young man stepped forward from among them. "Then, I'd like to ask a few questions."

"That is what you are supposed to do, young man. No need to ask for permission." Brown was happy to see the glimpses of participation. "What'd your name and question to this council be?"

"Bilal, mister. I work at the copper kilns." He took his own place at the center to address the crowd more effectively. "I was wondering about the speech your friend gave yesterday, about rising up and whatnot. Are... are we actually going to do something like that?"

"Yes. We're not stopping until we free everyone or we all die. Ayomide's statements are not rhetorical." Brown hesitated not in giving an answer, and the rest of his crew were in various levels of agreement.

Sounds of disbelief came from the crowd. Freeing all the slaves? While they were all locked up in some God-forsaken copper mine in an even more God-forsaken mountain? What were these madmen up to? They had all thought that they'd be making their way toward Zon'guldac by now.

"What's your plan sir?" It seemed that Bilal had taken the role of acting as a representative. "I think, and the others think, that it's obvious that we should be making plans for escape, not for stay."

"I'm not forcing you to stay here. Nobody is. Those who want to leave, can leave. I only ask you to lend me an ear and decide afterwards if you want to do so." Brown raised his voice. "I believe that, if you were to hear our plans, then you all would be able to make a decision that is beneficial to the commonwealth of the realm."

"Then let us hear, Mister Brown, your plan." Bilal crossed his arms, showing that acceptance wouldn't come easily.

"I'm happy to receive your cynicism, I'd rather have men thinking for themselves rather than those who are left as slave in their way of thought." Brown clapped his hands. "So, let us begin." He began circling around the dining table while talking, his hands clasped on his back.

"So, I understand that you might have some concerns. It is only natural to have those when you're going to face an entire empire. But!" Brown raised his voice "Let me remind you that we're facing an empire of lords and feuds. I, back in my home, had to face the might of an entire union of states!" Of course, Brown didn't exactly have the best of knowledge on feudal politics aside from the works of Shakespeare and other great writers. Still, if his assumption that this world would function similarly was correct, then it meant that the empire wasn't as united as it seemed at first glance. "Our enemy underestimates you, and looks down on you as subhuman! Tell me, who will win: a united front of the downtrodden or a disunited front of delusional silver-spoon lords?"



Brown paused to let the freemen debate each other for a minute or two. The voices seemed only a slight bit more positive; this was an improvement nonetheless. The voices silenced themselves when Bilal raised another objection. "And so? The count or some other lord can still easily extinguish us with their retainers. What do we do about that?"

Brown wished that he had a map to point to during this presentation, but he didn't. He did his best by using the cutlery that was on the dining table. He began by placing a large silver cup and a smaller ceramic cup next to each other. "Now, on one side is the might of a lord. On the other is us. Of course, you might think that facing this Goliath requires us to become a goliath of our own. I'd argue the opposite!" He threw a small cloth over the small cup "We are in the mountains, concealed from their sight. They know not exactly where we are, and we can retreat if they do find out." Such tactics, as Brown had learned from the people of Haiti, would be plenty effective against an empire.

Brown flicked the silver cup with his fingers; he recoiled as his finger hit the hard silver. The cup was knocked backwards, slightly towards the edge of the table. "We can strike, and they'll know not when, who, or what hit them. The slavers do not slave others just for the fun of it; they slave out of their greed. If we hit them where it hurts, right in the economy, by raiding their estates, their businesses, then their strength will only further dwindle and dwindle while ours only grow with each man we free." This time he pushed the small ceramic cup to knock the silver cup toward the edge; hurting his poor finger wasn't worth it to make such a cheesy point.

"What is our end goal then?" Talks of David and Goliath were fine, but Bilal still hadn't understood what Brown hoped he'd achieve at the end. "Do we create a new country for the slaves? Force the empire to abolish slavery?"

"That is a good question, and I was just about to get to that point, young man." Brown nodded in approval. "If we force the empire to abolish slavery, then none of our problems will be solved. The ones who had participated and perpetuated that horrible institution would not be punished, in opposite, they'd be the ones in charge of the process for abolition. Tell me, do you think Algernon would have worked honestly to free you, or would he have attempted to find another way to exploit you? The empire cannot and should not be reformed. In its place shall be a republic, for the people, by the people."

With his coming to the new world came a new political climate for Brown and he had adjusted his plan for abolition to fit it. Back in the United States he had hoped to kill off slavery by freeing the

slaves and forcing the federal government to eventually outlaw it. Of course, Gemeinplatz lacked any sort of democratic institutions that'd allow for such a chance, and Brown himself didn't like the concept of a monarchy or an empire. He was a man of the Constitution through and through, and he wouldn't be content with abolition.

The above proposal of Brown was quite a provocative one, even for the freemen. Monarchy was the norm; republics were limited to a few city states who, even then, only limited voting to a wealthy stratum. "But, Mister Brown, we're all poor here. If there's to be a republic, then none of us could vote."

"That's why I propose that everyone, of adult age and sane mind, should vote." Brown said something that was, according to the people in the room, more otherworldly than himself. "That's also the key to another question that you've asked: whether we should make a state that's separate to the freed slaves. I believe that such a circumstance would only cause further division and conflict." He didn't intend to establish an ethnostate of sorts. "We'd be in constant conflict with whatever remained of the empire. In such a scenario, either all the slaves get massacred or the people of the empire get massacred. Either way ends in massacre, and I hope that you'll agree that such a thing is a disagreeable outcome."

Indeed, 'massacre' wasn't exactly a thing that anybody in the room wanted. Still, there was one burning question. "But the lightskins wouldn't want to join in an uprising of darkskins."

"That is why, young Bilal, we have to get their support by liberating them too." He approached Shinasi, the only other man with white skin in the room, and presented him to the audience. "Do you think that the peasants, breaking their backs in the fields, are content with their lords? Would they not join us to overthrow their own masters? Of course, that is not as easy as it sounds. But, if it works..." he, with a swift slap, knocked the silver cup off of the table. It clanged loudly when it hit the floor. "...we'll have an inextinguishable fire on our hands."

Brown thought of the white Southern working class, who were about as racist as their upper-class. Being on the lower end of the social ladder ended up making them cling to ideas of racial supremacy with greater zeal than the landowning slavers, just so that they could feel a sense of supremacy. He hadn't gotten the details on the American Civil War that Jacob had mentioned, but the common sense of warfare dictated that those who had died on the frontlines to preserve slavery must have been the common men of the South who didn't own any slaves. He was sure that the lords here would attempt a similar thing, and that their subjects would be agitated and levied toward the slaves.

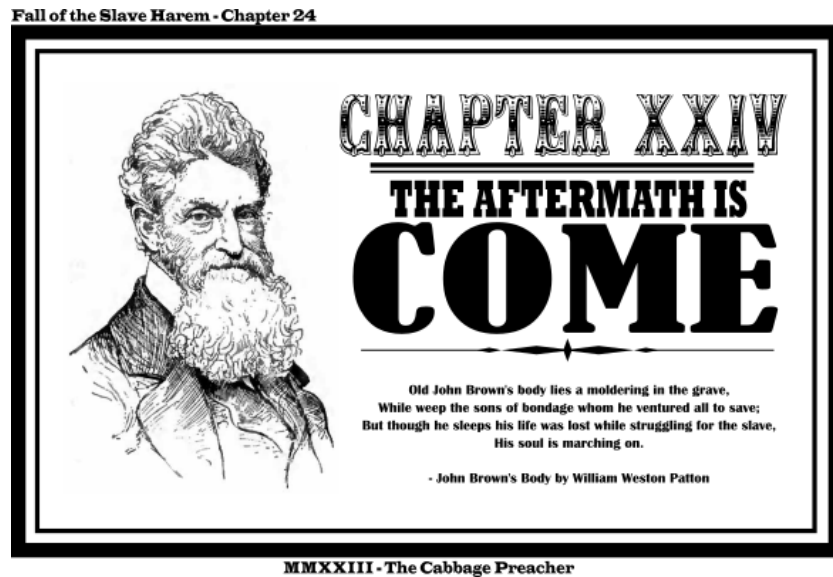
Still, things weren't too bleak, or Brown thought so anyways. The common man followed their superiors, in this case being the lords. With their lords gone, Brown hoped that the peasants could be educated to see the error of their ways. Perhaps this was idealistic, too idealistic even, but Brown hadn't gotten this far with pessimism. He wanted to die trying, not live idling, and he was sure that the Almighty would see him through to the bitter or sweet end that He had prepared for him.

The people in the room had stayed quiet since the silver cup dropped. They seemed to be in deep thought; joining such a fight wasn't a decision to be taken lightly. Fleeing to Zon'guldac was the safer and easier option, joining such a seemingly impossible revolution was risky and hard. However, Brown's fervor in speech and the way he seemed sure about victory had inspired others in the room.

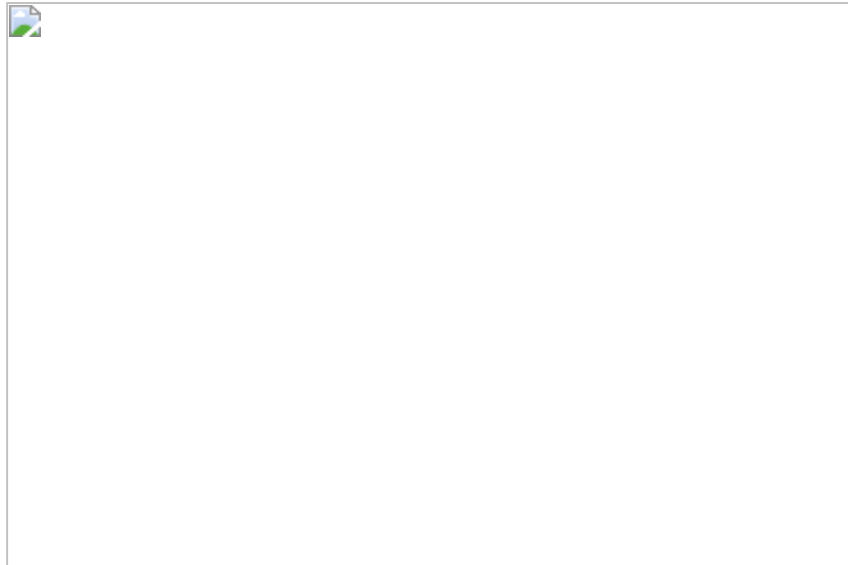
Perhaps a revolution wasn't impossible; thinking that it wasn't impossible was the first step in making it possible. Brown had sowed seeds of doubt, and he hoped that he'd reap a whirlwind of uprising. He ended the silence in the dining hall. "I can see that you all need to have some time to think. Providence guides us in our every step, but our Maker has also given mankind the ability to distinguish, choose and do right... or wrong. Think, debate, decide, and I'm sure that the Holy Spirit will guide you toward the right decision."

With this, Brown stopped his speech. He'd hear their decision when the council would gather again.

Chapter 27: Chapter XXIV – The aftermath is come.



It was the night of the day that the freemen had held their council. The debate had raged on for a long, long time, after they had dissolved. So much so that no other work had been done for the day, except for some slaves making preparations to depart to Zon'guldac.



Far away from all this worry was Ayomide and Ekene, intending to take a soak in the mansion's bath. One of the things that Brown insisted they bring along was soap; Ayomide could now see why. The old man had been worried about the spread of disease within their ranks, and had taken special care to direct the newly freed men toward the bath. They happily obliged, taking a hot bath was something that no one would object to.

Ekene witnessed Ayomide's less-than human features when she removed the bear fur that served as her cloak. "You one of those demi-humans?" The girl approached Ayomide, clearly intending to more closely observe her tail.

“Indeed I am. Is that a problem?” Ayomide instinctively took a few steps back. *Personal space, please.*

“No, no. I’ve just never seen one. Never left this mansion, you know.” Ekene breathed a sigh of relief. At least she could leave now. “I want to see all kinds of demi-humans and whatnot when I get to leave.” She was smiling as the thought of all the sights that she might see out there in the larger world.

“Travelling isn’t that easy, sister. The adventurers will hunt us down.” She took her first step into the water as she talked “You better stick with us Brown folk.”

Ekene joined Ayomide. She went silent for a few seconds to fully enjoy the water. “...but ain’t that man a bit insane? He’s talking about freeing everyone and toppling the big emperor man himself.” In a world where hierarchy and monarchy were the norm, thinking of an egalitarian society did indeed seem like the fever dream of a deranged lunatic.

“I think he is.” Ayomide closed her eyes. “Sister, you should just stick with a group if you want to increase your chance to survive. You don’t have to follow him to your grave. I certainly don’t intend to.”

Ekene raised her brow. Something seemed off with Ayomide’s statement just now. “You were giving all those fervent speeches about ‘liberty or death’. Were all those lies?”

“No, I’m was not lying about that. I do think that we’ll either live free or die.” She looked at a far away distance, toward particularly nothing. “But that’s our fate, isn’t it? Most either leave to Zon’guldac, to a faraway place that they know nothing about, or they die while reaching there. In our case, we’re either going to free ourselves in Gemeinplatz or find ourselves dead. This fact has nothing to do with the old man.”

Ekene took one of the bars of soap from a corner, and began rinsing herself. “And all the other stuff about dehmokrasee?”

Ayomide seriously thought of this question for a while. “...I don’t know.” This was her honest answer. “I’m not exactly a philosopher or one of those political theorists. I don’t really care whether the lightskins get to live under a better Gemeinplatz. Most of them can all go to an Otherworld, for all I care.” Having been enslaved hadn’t left much empathy in Ayomide, or any of the other slaves for that matter. “Still, the old man delivers on the emancipation front, and that’s all I, and you, should care about for now. We can all bail out if he goes too crazy on the other stuff.”

“I guess. I don’t even know how I could reach Zon’guldac in the first place.” Ekene handed her soap over to Ayomide. “Could you wash my back please? I can’t reach there.”

“No problem.” Ekene turned around to let Ayomide reach her back. Ayomide recoiled when she saw the whip scars, some new some old, scattered around her back. They all looked like deep canyons of torn flesh, an unpleasant image of cruelty that said a thousand words in itself. “Holy... This is all Algernon?”

“Yes.” Ekene remembered Ayomide healing Hakim’s injured leg. “Can you do something about them with your magic?”

Ayomide shook her head, even though Ekene couldn’t see it. “I can’t heal scars, unfortunately. That’s really advanced stuff that white-bearded hermits do.” She began doing her best to rinse

Ekene's back, trying to avoid the scars. Ekene still winced as soap made contact with her. "...What a bastard."

"Well, I don't think he was too cruel, compared to other masters I've heard about." Ekene didn't want to go into further detail about other horrors, so she fell silent after making this remark.

"Not to mention, thousands of masters live in Gemeinplatz..." Her and Ekene's horrors were only a miniscule part of the horrors that the entire institution of slavery brought. "And Brown always talks about how merciful his all-powerful god supposedly is. Not to mention the guys over at the Temple of the Divine, they've always annoyed me."

"...but doesn't his god also allow him to emancipate the enslaved?" Ekene asked a question that irked Ayomide, but she wasn't in the mood for needless theological debate. She didn't mind what Brown thought as long as he wasn't thinking anything malevolent. Ekene had another question. "Also, what's this 'Temple of the Divine'?"

Ayomide was surprised at the fact that Ekene was so sheltered. "I don't really know, since Jacob never allowed us in to their sermons." Most otherworlders tended to be irreligious, especially those from East Asia, so attendance among them was very low. "Apparently, they're guys who believe in a divine force that rules over the universe, pretty similar to Brown's religion. Pretty big deal in Gemeinplatz, far as I know. I'm surprised you haven't heard of them."

"Ah..." Ekene suddenly understood something that had bugged her for a long time. "I've always seen an old, clergyman visit Algernon once in a while. He muttered something about 'salvation' or whatnot, but he didn't like to interact with the slaves too much."

"Then he's from the Temple. They came around now and then to ask Jacob for donations." She stood back as she had finished cleaning the back of Ekene. "I scratch your back, you scratch mine?" She handed the soap over to her companion.

"Sure, o' majestic Lady Orange. Your faithful servant shall do her best to clean your precious back." Ayomide couldn't help but laugh; it seems that Hakim and Tater had already spread her reputation. A former slave serving another former slave in such a manner seemed so funny to both.

"Commence, peasant. Suitably rinse my back or else your back shalt be unsuitably rinsed. The Lord sayeth thusly."



“Aw, man...” Shinasi heaved a deep sigh, staring into the deep, dark unknown of the mountains. He was on guard duty, just like he had been before. Brown had chosen him as to not look suspicious to any passersby.

There wasn't anything stirring in the unknown beyond, so poor Shinasi had been left alone with his thoughts. He had joined Brown, on a sort of whim, partly for ideological reasons, and mostly for the sake of love that he hadn't fully confessed even to himself. He considered just running back to Azdavay, he still could, but he also equally didn't want to return.

The behavior of Algernon had steeled his resolve somewhat, but hesitation was a beast that was greater than any fantastic creature Gemeinplatz could throw at him. He wasn't a slave, he was a freeman that still had the potential to pull himself up by the bootstraps, or so his inner voice told him. But, would he be fulfilled if he did pull himself up, stomping on others on the way? Or did he want to throw the bootstraps away and forge a new path that was full of uncertainty?

“Hey.” A voice from behind startled Shinasi. He turned around, shield up and spear ready to go, only to meet a person that spelled trouble for his troubled heart.

“O- Oh, Ayomide. It's you.” He put his shield down, literally, and put another shield up, figuratively. “Please, don't arrive so suddenly. I'm on watch and alert; I wouldn't want to injure an ally.”

“Right, I'm an ally now am I, Mr. Bounty Hunter.” Ayomide approached him further. The woman that had saved him, and in most unacceptable fashion according to Gemeinplatzian society, poor Shinasi had sort of fallen for. “How's your watch going? Any fugitives?”

“There's a whole camp of them behind me.” Shinasi nodded toward the mansion. “Not to mention the errant one in front of me right now. I don't know what to do when odds are so stacked against me.” He had learned to play along with Ayomide.

Ayomide replied by laughing. “I see. You must have your work cut out for you then. Poor Shinasi... You're such a bad guard that you let a whole slave rebellion into the estate!” She stopped to go back to what she intended to talk about when she had arrived at the scene. “Anyways, I heard that you were looking for someone.”

“Hm?!” Shinasi couldn’t help but shout. He was worried that the conversation might steer to that point, and he looked visibly flustered. “Um, I-”

“And I was so worried for my dear adventurer friend, he might lose his job if he fails his quest. That wouldn’t do, would it?” Ayomide shook her head to emphasize her point. She was visibly smirking. “Don’t worry, I’ve found the one your query was about.” Ayomide took out the red ribbon she had been keeping. “I’ll deliver it to her whenever I have the opportunity.”

Shinasi only got even more flustered as the conversation went on. *‘Deliver it to her whenever I have the opportunity’? What’s she trying to imply there?* He took a good luck at Ayomide in his heart-thumping state. Women in Gemeinplatz had long hair; Ayomide always cut it short. The most beautiful of hairs were considered to be blond; she had an odd ginger color. The ideal for any person was skin that was indistinguishable from porcelain; hers was undistinguishable from the night. Yet...

Ayomide suddenly interrupted Shinasi. “Ahem, aside from that...” It was her time to get serious, and nervous. She shook around nervously, gaze averted from Shinasi, as she hid the ribbon behind her back. Speaking seriously, from the heart, was hard business for anyone as young as her. “You did a good job, some of us might have died if you hadn’t found when your buddies had a holiday.” She remembered the scarred back of her new sister, Ekene. “A lot of people are now free, with your help. Uhm... thank you.” She had to force herself to say the last part. “...you’re not too horrible, I guess.”

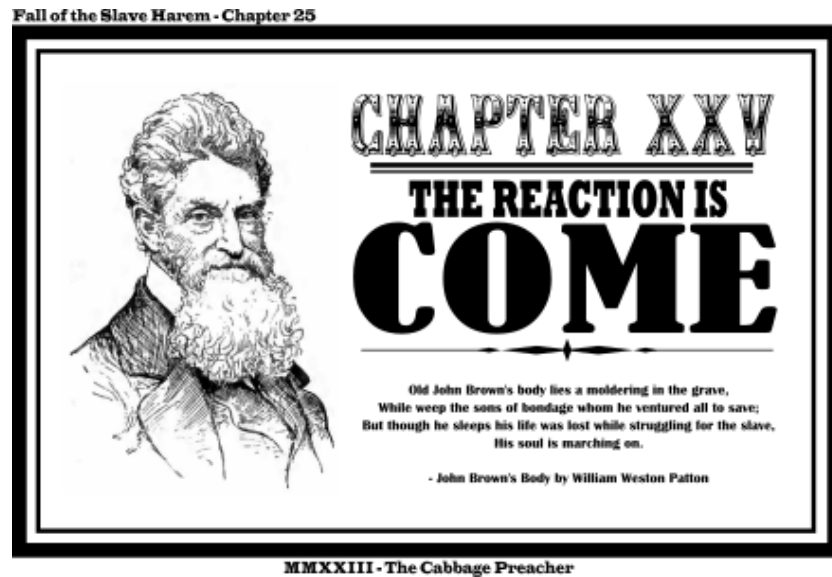
“I- I’m...” Shinasi couldn’t believe the last part. He wasn’t sure if he might’ve misheard. “I’m what? Could you repeat the last part?”

“I said that you’re not too horrible!” Ayomide’s composure was now broken. She quickly began taking a few steps back. Being honest was a bit too much. “Good night to you!” She ran away, back towards the mansion.

Shinasi stared, slack-jawed, at the quickly retreating Ayomide. He had been at that position a while ago. *I guess she can get nervous as well...* He scratched his head, and couldn’t help but dryly laugh out of stress. His heart was beating so fast that he could faint right at this moment.

I’m not seeing visions, right? I took care not to drink too much before my shift...

Chapter 28: Chapter XXV – The reaction is come.



2nd of Summer, 5859

Former Estate of Sir Algernon (new name still pending), Azdavay / Casamonu

Lady Leila was resting in her bedroom, reading a book about the wonders that laid on Earth. She was softly rocking back on forth on a chair, cozying herself by the fireside.

Today was not a good day.

She had woken up this morning, in hopes that maybe the whole slave uprising was just a nightmare, but the former miners marching up and down the garden leisurely had ridden her of that notion. All of yesterday's executions were real, her husband's death was real, and her current troubled predicament was also very much real.

Any moment, she thought, the band of savages that lay outside could end her life. Perhaps death would be the better alternative. She didn't exactly know what to do after being widowed so suddenly, left with two (plus one) children. Leila had no choice but return to the Earlywatch family she originated from, if she could survive that is.

Suddenly, a knock came from her door, distracting her from all the doom and gloom. "Are you in here, Leila?" Leila didn't answer, but her visitor rudely entered the room anyways. Her visitor was a demi-human, a darkskin, and her informal manner of address would have gotten her something worse than the whip anywhere in Gemeinplatz.

"I'm apparently supposed to take care of you, since Ekene and Ejike didn't want to do it." Ayomide didn't seem too pleased with her assignment. She wasn't that willing to return to duties related to masters or mistresses, nobody else was willing, hence why Ayomide had been the one left to take on this job. "Here, your food." She left a loaf of bread, made from shepherd's reed flour. Hakim hadn't gotten around to sorting through the mansion's pantry yet, and this was the best that they had.

Leila blankly stared at, what could hardly be called, the piece of food dropped in front of her. “So... are you planning to kill me or?” She didn’t expect much from what she saw as a bunch of uneducated, uppity children.

“No, Brown was quite worked up about ‘the Lord’s mercy, Jesus Christ, think of the children and so on and so forth’. The rest of the freemen don’t seem enthusiastic about hanging you either, you know, with the whole children thing.” Ayomide clapped sarcastically. “Good job. You get to live another day.”

“Eh?” This surprised the former mistress more than the uprising itself. The last thing she was expecting was any form of mercy. “What are you going to do with me then?”

“You’re our prisoner, until you’re ransomed off. You come from a noble family, right? They must have quite the load of spare money.” Ayomide looked around the room, finding suitable quill and paper on a desk. She put them in front of Leila and continued with an air of formality, as if she was conducting legitimate business. “We hope that you’ll be able to provide us with suitable funds. Also, write your letter with Awmereighkan letters. Brown will be checking what you’ve written to make sure you’re keeping your part of the deal.”

Leila was pretty sure that a deal required two consenting parties, but she also was pretty sure one couldn’t object to being ransomed. “...Understood.” She at least wanted to do her best to keep what had remained of her family alive.

The ex-mistress took the quill, and began writing her own letter for ransom.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

It was another foggy, rainy summer day in Casamonu, but no matter the weather, the wheels of business needed to turn no matter what. Industry in Casamonu was always hungry for ‘brown gold’, so caravans were almost always making their way up from the city to the mountains. Today too, a group of porters from Casamonu aided by pack animals and adventurers made their way to the Mount Curry in order to buy copper. Their group wasn’t too big; the tight mountain path was impossible to navigate with a large group.



One of their first stops was the Algernon Estate, a major producer of copper. Thanks to his abundant copper, caravans would often find what they were looking for at a good price there. Much to their dismay, however, they were greeted by a guard in front of the estate. The head of the caravan hailed the guard at the gate.

“Sorry, but we’ve got quite the plague going on in here, and those slaves refuse to work. No copper left in storage, either.” Shinasi was wearing a cloth mask to emphasize his point of there being a plague.

“What? That’s preposterous. I’d like to see your manager, young man!” The head of the caravan didn’t seem too pleased at missing his cheap copper.

“Sir Algernon himself is currently too sick to meet you. I think, sir, it’s better that you avoid going in lest you catch this awful plague yourself.” Shinasi took out a letter from his pocket, along with a few groschen. “His wife wants to send her family back home a letter. Sir Algernon would be quite pleased if you could help the letter find its way.”

The head of the caravan calmed down. He didn’t want to fall ill either, so he had no choice but to oblige in not entering the estate. He took the letter and money from Shinasi; sending letters through passing caravans wasn’t too uncommon up in the isolated mountains. “Good day to you, then.”

“Good day to you too, sir.” Shinasi watched as the caravan disappeared off into the fog.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Back at the estate, Brown was busy with convening the council again. “Gather around, no pushing.” Today would be the day of decision. The crowd was smaller compared to yesterday, around twenty people had decided to make way for Zon’guldac. Perhaps a couple more would make their way in the following days. Still, Brown was pleased to see that around thirty people remained.

“I hereby officially... you know what, there’s no need for formalities. We need action, not words. We have had more than enough speech already, I’d say.” John Brown put his hands on the dining table where everyone had gathered. He took a good look at all the freemen once more. “Ladies and gentlemen, with the Almighty as our witness, are ye ready to fight for the freedom of your brothers and sisters in bondage?”

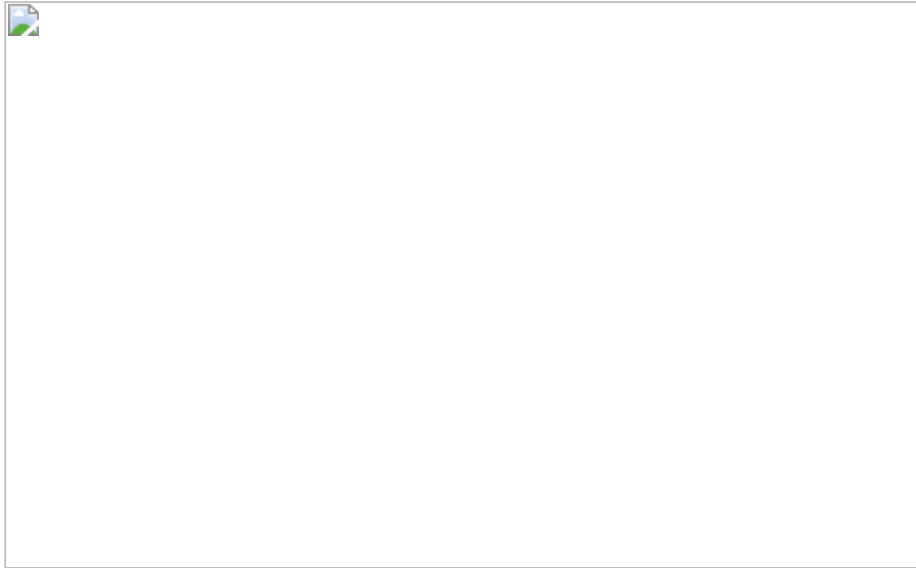
Most of the people had stayed here to answer just that. There wasn’t much need for an answer, but some of the more creative freemen had prepared one that was concise. Bilal rose up from his chair, and delivered a curious item to the table: a copper spear head.

“There are some kilns in this estate; we’ve mostly turned copper into bars for easier transport, until now.” He pushed the spear head toward Brown, who picked it up and raised it in front of his eyes to take a proper look. Its construction was pretty crude, with juts and imperfections everywhere, not surprising considering that it had been only made in the one-day period after the slaves’ liberation. “We hope to continue developing ways which we can deliver copper in a faster and more efficient manner to a wider base of customers.” He made the motion of throwing a spear.

“May God bless you, what sweet words you lend to my ears today!” Brown laughed as he patted Bilal on the back. “Witty remarks, and a will to back them up, the way a man should be. Mister Bilal, was it? And your comrades here.” There was hope, even in a realm so foreign to Brown. Humanity, in its nature, seemed the same no matter where. “I’m afraid that the road ahead for our

business will be rough, arduous, even boring to some extent. But, with Providence shining down with utmost grace upon us sinners, we shall pull through. Now, as I've promised, no more talk. Let us get to action!"

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



4th of Summer, 5859
Earlywatch Estate, Outskirts of Casamonu

Within the outskirts near any large settlement lay the estates of the noble sort, and Casamonu was no exception. From the estate of the Count himself to the lowliest and pettiest (in both senses of the word) estates of various knights and dames, along with the occasional big shot merchant who had found themselves lucky enough to grab some land.

Most of the houses were modeled after buildings on Earth, from grand castles of the Orient to not-so-grand American McMansions, for the nobility paid upmost importance to having otherworlder blood. It was the blood of heroes, kings and sex pests after all. Their blood was bluer than lapis, nobler than any revolting peasant, higher than the Heavens that stood atop them. Thus, they received their higher-than-divine right to rule over all under their shiny new boots they just ordered from overseas.

One particular exception was the Earlywatch family, as can be inferred by their surname, they didn't trace their lineage to any otherworlders. Sure, they had married other families to acquire some of that blue blood, but they still stood as an exception for having a surname that wasn't foreign. They prided themselves for being the descendants of the bastard child of a former emperor's third cousin-thrice-removed instead, which was a greater achievement compared to being descended by some guy from Shandong or whatever.

Despite their claim to great blood however, their estate wasn't that great compared to others. Their mansion was a small, reasonable one constructed in European (or '*Yoropean*' as they spelled it) style, a style that was still somewhat in fashion. Its bricks had slowly begun to fade, and a couple shingles on the roof had gone missing without anyone bothering to put them back up. Only a couple peasants attended to the fields around this mansion, slaves were a bit too expensive, not to mention the fact that the owner didn't want anyone darker than limestone running around his place.

This marked an example of the not-quite-uncommon-as-one-might-think phenomenon of ‘being too racist to own slaves’.

The aforementioned owner was one Sir Baha Earlywatch, a knight under Count Leon. He was sitting in his office, slowly checking over droll financial figures that needed cooking. Baha would have loved to give this job to a steward, but he also didn’t trust someone else to handle his property. Maybe he’d have been in a better financial situation if he did.

“Sir.” One of his servants entered the room, letter in hand. He bowed down to greet his lord before continuing to speak. “A letter has arrived, from Lady Leila.” The servant dropped the letter on his desk and promptly left the room.

Sir Baha casually took the letter to his hand. Leila was his sister, they continued to exchange letters even in her absence. *I hope it isn’t a letter that’s full of complaints about her husband again...* Baha sighed, but he was happy to keep in touch with his sister regardless of her tendency to talk about Algernon’s treatment of the slaves. *He should just get rid of his slaves if he dislikes them so much.*

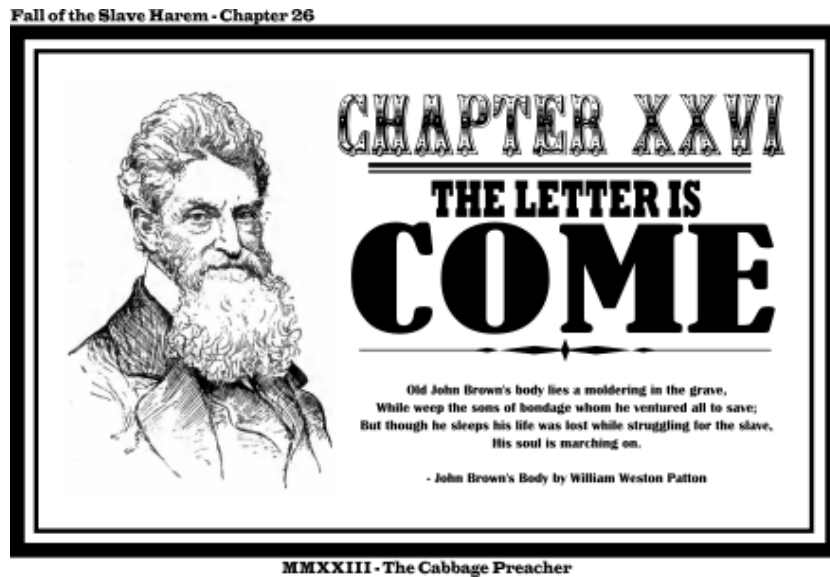
Baha couldn’t complain too much about Algernon, openly at least, as Algernon was the cousin of Count Leon. To be honest, he didn’t have much to complain about, Algernon treated Leila decently at the least. He thought that it was lucky that his sister had gotten married to such a close relative of the count, ensuring a secure position for the rest of the Earlywatch household.

The petty knight slowly opened the letter, expecting the usual as detailed above. “Dear brother, I hope that the Divine grants you Its favor and this letter reaches your hands without problem.” Baha smiled upon seeing his sister’s usual greeting. “Unfortunately, I think that Algernon has finally incurred divine wrath and I’m afraid that I’ve been caught in this wrath? Ha!” He couldn’t help but laugh at this expression. She was probably going to talk about some minor inconvenience that had fallen upon the poor man. “The slaves have risen up and...” The letter was getting less funnier the more he read “...have executed Algernon? I’m currently a prisoner...”

Baha re-read the letter a couple more times to make sure that his mind was not playing any tricks on him.

No matter how many times he read it, however, its contents didn’t change.

Chapter 29: Chapter XXVI – The letter is come.



5th of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, Empire of Gemeinplatz

An interesting letter had arrived at Sir Leon's desk today. He calmly read its contents, not sure whether to be happy or frustrated with the news.



“...and, Your Excellency, I implore you to gather your council and help me save my sister and avenge your kinsman as soon as possible. Your most faithful vassal, Sir Baha Earlywatch.” Leon put the letter down, leaning back on his desk to think. He had thought that it was likely for some incident to be arisen due to the fugitives, but he hadn't thought that such a bold move was possible.

Killing a nobleman, kidnapping his cousin, *and* occupying a mine? Something afoul must be up, or so thought Leon. The exodus of slaves and this uprising couldn't have occurred without outside intervention. For all he knew, Leon was facing powers that far surpassed a border count like him.

Right now, greater powers or not, Leon had a situation he had to respond to. He didn't personally care much about his cousin, Algernon. Sir Algernon was a very far off relative that Leon had barely even seen and, to be honest, he couldn't care less about the death of one of his many cousins.

What Leon could care about was the killing of a nobleman in his territory, especially one of his kinsmen from the Satō-Wang family. Not to mention the fact that, if news of slaves occupying a mine in his territory got out, then it'd make Leon look weak and incompetent. He definitely didn't want his reputation being tarnished by a bunch of fugitives. Various guilds in Azdavay had gone bankrupt after the exodus, and merchants in Casamonu itself had expressed concerns about the safety of their jobs. This, everything about these uppity slaves, had to be stopped before it got out of hand.

The survival of the count's rule preceded the survival of some minor vassal's sister.

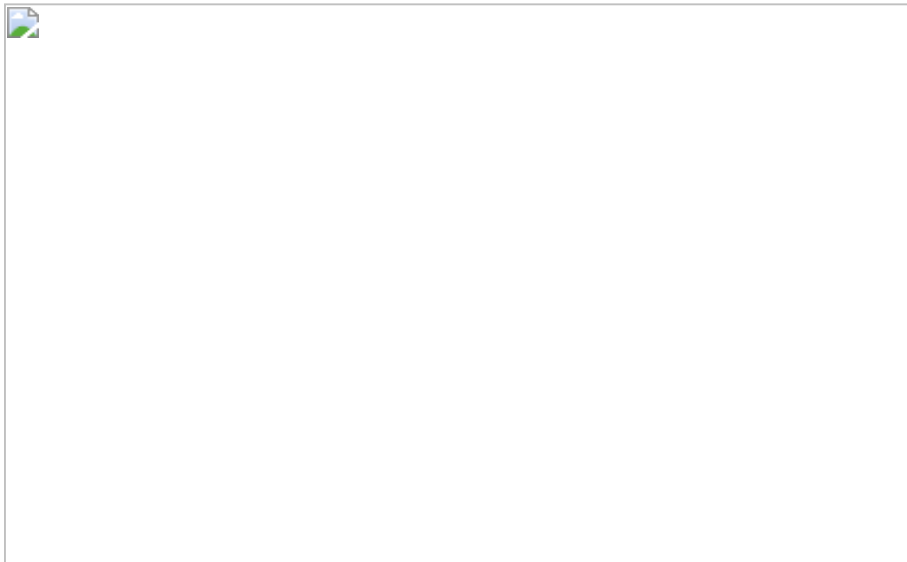
Thankfully, Leon wasn't an idle or carefree man. The count had calculated that the fugitives might strike back sooner or later. He had been busy politicking and calling in various favors the last month, doing his best to gather a voluntary response team of respected individuals from his county. Thanks to his efforts, Leon wouldn't have to personally spend a penny outfitting this force.

'Not spending a penny' sounded very delightful indeed. Leon patted himself on the back for a job well-done. "Hilmi!" His trustworthy servant came running into the room at Leon's command. The count took out a small stack of letters and handed it over to the servant. "Send these to the addresses written on them."

"Understood, Your Excellency." The servant bowed and took his leave. Leon was smiling at his own genius idea: pre-writing the letters he needed to summon everyone. He had just given the orders to summon the likes of Kim Seong-min and Long Dong. The count didn't know if all of them would come, he was sure some of them would shirk their responsibilities, but he didn't need much to retake the mines.

Now all Leon needed to do was patiently wait. Soon, this little insurrection would be crushed at little cost.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



5th of Summer, 5859

Former Estate of Sir Algernon (new name ever pending), Azdavay / Casamonu

“Cemil! You’re too far to the right. Move it... Yes, right there.” Bilal commanded a group of miners from atop an incline. He had been tasked, after having shown his skills as a representative, with leading a group of freemen to strengthen the fortifications around the mine. The first order of business was to construct a trench around the estate to slow enemies down. Digging a simple trench was all too easy for a group of experienced miners. A dozen miners, armed with their shovels and picks, worked around the clock to realize this plan.

Lady Leila gave them precious time to prepare. Brown thought that no one would dare strike while they held a noblewoman hostage. Still, it wasn’t a bad idea to keep the powder dry and have the men ready to fight in case Sir Baha wasn’t willing to cede to their demands. For that purpose, Ayomide and Shinasi had been tasked with imparting their knowledge of combat to the newly recruited freemen. These two squads of miners and fighters worked in shifts, switching personnel every day.

A small group of kiln workers was also tasked with making javelins and other tools from copper, a process that was going slowly. They had previously only worked to refine impure copper ore into bars for easier transportation, meaning that they didn’t have any experience with toolmaking.

Thankfully, copper wasn’t too hard to manipulate and work with. The kiln workers had already managed to copy the makeshift stone spears by pressing them into clay molds. Molten copper could be poured into these molds to create new, better spearheads. Copper by itself wasn’t particularly sharp or strong, but this method was much faster compared to knapping stone. Speed was important when one needed to equip an army of thirty men.

Feeding all of these working men was Hakim and Tater, who worked to forage the forests of Azdavay and Casamonu for food. With the help of the estate’s kitchen, they could work to cook foods that were comfortably edible.

All of the above, however, was interrupted when a visitor came upon the gates of the estate. Riding up the path was a man on a horse, with his hands raised up to show that he was unarmed. From his attire, a one-piece suit and a bowtie, one could see that he was most likely some sort of servant. “I come in the name of my lord, Sir Baha Earlywatch!” He was quickly surrounded by a group of freemen carrying spears.

“Who might you be?” Shinasi, the new gatekeeper of the estate, split apart the sea of people to greet their guest. “Are you here to deliver, or are you here to make empty pleas?”

“I’m here to do both, if that’s possible.” The old servant jumped off his horse. He opened a large bag attached to the saddle, revealing various tools such as hammers and saws, along with a small sum of money. This servant didn’t know why the slaves had such odd requests for ransom, he’d have only requested money if he ever kidnapped a noble. “Think of these as a down payment. My lord will not send the rest unless I get to meet Lady Leila, and her children, in person and confirm that she’s fine.”

“I’ll be escorting you to her.” Shinasi signaled the crowd to stand back. “Don’t try anything reckless or your dear mistress’ life will be forfeit.” The crowd of freemen parted to allow Shinasi and the servant to pass through. The armed freemen followed them afterwards to make sure that the servant couldn’t pull off any dirty magical tricks.

The servant followed Shinasi up to the second floor. There, Shinasi knocked on Leila's room. "Ayomide, you in there?"

The door unlocked. "Yes, I've been stuck in here for the last few hours." An annoyed Ayomide showed her face. She noticed the servant. "Oh, this must be the 'Ted' that the kids have been talking about. Come in, they're still alive." She stood right next to Ted, ready to dispel any spells that he might try to cast. Something like teleportation was rare in Gemeinplatz, but one could never be too sure.

Entering the room, Ted was happy to see his mistress and her children to be alive and well. They were in a much better condition than he anticipated. He had expected the freemen to commit unspeakable acts, but Leila seemed as fine as a newly widowed woman reasonably could be. The children seemed to be cheerful, but bored, and mostly ignorant of their situation.

"Ted? Is it Ted?" Ani and Timmy got up to greet this familiar face, while Leila sufficed with meekly waving at him. "Uncle! Are we going back? Father left so suddenly..." They surrounded poor Ted while pestering him with questions. He wasn't actually their uncle, but he might as well have been.

"Well..." He carefully looked over his shoulder to Ayomide. Ted didn't exactly know how to convey their situation to the children. He was honestly furious of the fact that he had to negotiate with a bunch of slaves. "You see, he has been suddenly assigned... to assist the emperor. We won't be seeing him for a while." The downfall of their father's death would have to be dealt by Lady Leila. "Your father sold the estate when he left, so we'll have to go back to living with Uncle Baha. Behave well, okay? He's currently trying to get your carriages ready for the trip back."

"Oh... Okay..." The kids seemed sullen at the prospect of Algernon's sudden assignment. They could feel that there was something much more serious going on, kids are creatures that are much sharper than they might initially seem, but they could also feel that the adults in the room wouldn't give them clear answers.

"And, mistress." Ted turned to addressing the woman of the hour. "Have you been doing well? These..." He was about to use an insulting word here, but he retreated upon realization of the fact that he was surrounded by armed slaves. "...slaves, they haven't done anything horrible, have they?"

"No, no, I'm fine." Leila heaved a deep sigh. "As fine as I can be in... such an unexpected situation." She herself was still surprised at the fact that no harm had come to her. Nothing else had happened, outside of a couple of verbal attacks whose perpetrators got a large scoop of admonishment from Brown (for it didn't bode well for one to insult a lady). Ayomide and Brown had protected her from anything graver than the aforementioned.

Ted asked again to confirm her response, and Leila responded in a similar fashion. He was trying to make sure that the mistress wasn't being forced to downplay the abuse committed by the slaves, but she seemed to genuinely not have had anything done to her. "I'm happy, mistress, to see that you are alive and well."

"Alright, had enough of your emotional chit-chat?" Ayomide's arms were getting tired of restraining Ted. "Bring the rest of the goods if you want to have a nice, long chat with her." With this she pulled Ted out of the room, locking the door behind her.

“As you’ve heard from our own Lady Orange. No recoupment, no reunion.” Shinasi had fit into the role of a ransoming bandit pretty well. He felt oddly proud of this fact, and he also enjoyed the part where he got to indirectly order a nobleman to do something.

Shinasi quickly escorted Ted back to his horse. Their business was done and conducted, for now. “As our old man says, ‘Skedaddle!’.” The freemen watched as the servant disappeared into the horizon.

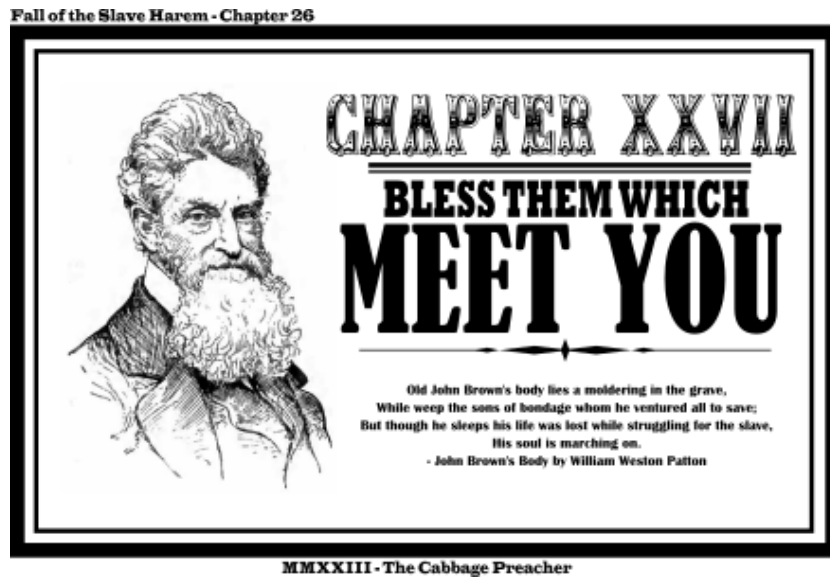
They knew not what’d arrive next...

“Halt! Who are you?” Shinasi turned around to look at the source of the commotion. There he found an enigmatic black figure clad with a dark shawl and a long dress, who kept a safe distance away from the freemen assembled around her. She was flanked by two figures clad in pitch black robes whose faces were obscured by hoods. Nobody in the crowd could decipher who she was.

“Brothers and sisters, do not be afraid of me.” The one speaking was the enigmatic old woman who, judging from her position, seemed to be the leader of this group. Her face was scowling, not out of anger at anyone present, but out of great perpetual discontent from how mankind treated itself. Her face was wrinkled all over from years of endless fighting, in and out the battlefield. Only a kerchief was present to cover her head.

“I only wish to see old John Brown once more.”

Chapter 30: Chapter XXVII – Bless them which meet you.



*Most that I have done and suffered in the service of our cause has been in public, and I have received much encouragement at every step of the way. **You, on the other hand, have labored in a private way. I have wrought in the day, you in the night.** I have had the applause of the crowd and the satisfaction that comes of being approved by the multitude, while the most that you have done has been witnessed by a few trembling, scarred, and foot-sore bondmen and women, whom you have led out of the house of bondage, and whose heartfelt "God bless you" has been your only reward. The midnight sky and the silent stars have been the witnesses of your devotion to freedom and of your heroism. **Excepting John Brown, of sacred memory, I know of no one who has willingly encountered more perils and hardships to serve our enslaved people than you have.***

- Frederick Douglass' letter to a certain someone (1868)

Old John Brown sat in his new room, the former dining room of the Algernon estate, inspecting what might be the most important item in the entire building: a map detailing Mount Curry and its immediate area. He had found this map while looking around the late Algernon's office. Other copper mines, farms, villages... All were noted on one gargantuan piece of paper detailing bits of information about these locations. This would be pretty useful for their future expeditions, and Brown had already begun constructing further plans in his head.

Ayomide came into the room, carrying two cups of tea. "Old man, you still staring at the paper?" She set one cup down for Brown, and took a sip from the other. Getting something to drink other than slime soup felt heavenly.

"May God bless you, young lady." Brown accepted Ayomide's offer for having a tea break. He leaned back on his chair, his old spine making concerning cracks as he did. "I wish we had someone else that could read, but alas." These sorts of jobs requiring literacy had all been left to Brown. Latin script was pretty commonly used in Gemeinplatz, as Brown had observed in his visit to Azdavay, and items like maps usually had transcriptions in English written under native Gemeinplatzian script.

Ayomide stared at the map with a blank expression. She was unable to read any of the text on it. “Man, I wish I could read.” Knowledge was power; the slaveowners definitely didn’t intend to distribute power to their chattel. “All of these symbols look too complicated to learn. Too many of them.”

“It’s not too complicated, young lady. The English alphabet isn’t, anyways, I don’t know anything about this other writing that they use in this realm.” Brown leaned forward to point at a point on the map that was spelled with an “A”. “For example, this is pronounced as ‘a’. *A*. There are twenty-five other letters like it, learning them all shouldn’t be too hard.”

“*Eigh*. *Eeeigh*.” The odd way that an English speaker like Brown spelt ‘A’ didn’t help Ayomide much in understanding anything. “*Eigh*? Which place has a name beginning with *eigh*?”

“*Azdaweigh*. The town that we had visited, young lady.” Even if the local language had been somehow beamed into his mind, Brown wasn’t adept at pronunciation.

“That’s pronounced *Az-da-vay*. Not *Eigh-zee-da-weeigh*, whatever that’s supposed to be.” Ayomide took another look at the letter ‘A’. “I’m guessing that this is supposed to be pronounced more like [a:] not [eɪ]. We’re not in Awmereighka, old man. Nobody here pronounces anything like that.”

“Is that so...” Pronunciation was a battle that was fiercer than any battles Brown had in Kansas. Even with divine intervention, it seemed, he wouldn’t be able to stop pronouncing “A” differently. “Oh Lord, guide me in pronunciation.” He took a sip out of his tea to calm himself down. “No matter my pronunciation, I plan on getting to teach everyone how to read and write eventually.” Currently, the former Algernon estate was operating in a mode of full mobilization which left no time for A’s, B’s and C’s.

Literacy would have to come after they were sure that they could defend this place, or organize an orderly retreat if they couldn’t. Realistically, Brown thought, they had to retreat from the estate. He didn’t plan on staying here for long anyways, guerilla warfare like the one he planned to conduct involved not having any known place that the enemy could assault. Staying immobile in a known location was the worst case scenario. Still, before the local forces could mobilize to meet him, Brown planned on using the estate as much as he could before their inevitable retreat.

“Mister Brown, hello? Anybody there?” Ayomide waved her hand in front of Brown, who had spaced out while thinking of future plans.

“Sorry, young lady. I was just following a train of thought that happened to pass by.” Brown took a deep breath. The future was the future; the present was the present. He needed to focus on what was in front of him right now. “I think it’d be best if I trained someone to be a teacher, someone who has decent command of this realm’s language.”

“Guess I can do that. I don’t mind learning how to read and write. I could teach the rest.” Her time in the service industry as a waitress had already given Ayomide a decent grasp of Gemeinplatizian language. Learning to read and write didn’t seem to be too daunting of a task: memorizing twenty-six letters wasn’t exactly the hardest thing in the world.

“Great, young lady.” Brown seemed pleased at her willingness to learn the ABCs. “Then... Let us begin right now, if you are not occupied.” He grabbed an errant sheet of empty paper, and intended to write some letters on it, before he was interrupted by a knock on the door. “...Or not. Come in, we’re not busy.”

A small group entered the office, which was a lot more than Brown had expected from a single knock. This group of freemen was armed with spears, and they surrounded a smaller group of three people.

Brown was about to ask what the meaning of their visit was, but he immediately stopped once he realized the existence of a certain old woman among the ranks of the smaller group. The old man rubbed his eyes two or three, trying to make sure that he wasn't seeing some sort of illusion. The familiar figure still stood in front of him, as real as anything else in the room.

"Praise be to the Lord, is that..." Brown rose up from his chair to show respect. "...is that really you? I had heard about one 'Miss Moses', but I thought that it was impossible for it to be you!"

"As real as you are, Brown." The old woman slowly walked toward Brown. "I knew that you were not the type of man to lay calmly, moldering in a grave."

The crowd of freemen looked at each other, confused as to what connection these two people might have. Bilal stepped forward to voice their concerns. "Who's this woman, Mister Brown?"

"Right. You probably haven't been acquainted." Brown stepped aside to present an old friend to the people in the room. "I bring you one of the best and bravest persons on the American continent and on this realm: General Tubman as we called her."



"Harriet Tubman. Former conductor on the Underground Railroad and..." Tubman walked toward the two people she had brought along with her. "...current conductor of the League of Canaanites."

"So those queer hooded figures talking about 'Miss Moses'..." Brown definitely remembered seeing the same sort of dark, hooded people back in his flight from Azdavay. "...they were your men?" His smile widened greatly. "It seems that General Tubman has outshone us once again." None of the men in the room, except for Brown and the men of the league, had ever seen Tubman. They weren't sure as to what Brown was alluding to by "once again".

“It is only by the grace of God that we’ve been able to get so far, Brown. So far back in America, and so far here in Gemeinplatz. The Lord hasn’t deserted us in any trouble.” Tubman didn’t forget to add an obligatory dose of Christian humility.

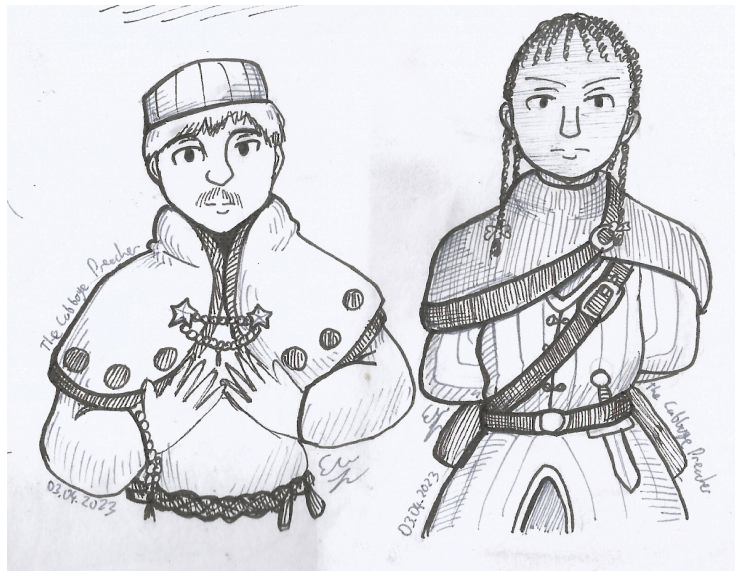
“Indeed, let us not forget that.” Brown added a few more words of praise to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit before continuing. The freemen watched while these otherworlders participated in this odd ritual. Ayomide yawned; she had seen this same thing play out far too many times whenever the old man achieved something. “...Now then, General Tubman, please sit down. Join me for some tea, and let us talk of business as usual.”

“That’d be nice, yes.” Harriet took a seat, along with her hooded comrades, and the crowd of curious onlookers dispersed. They weren’t exactly interested in eavesdropping on a conversation between two close comrades, not to mention the fact that they had actual work to do.

Ayomide soon came back with a fresh cup of tea for her new sister. “Here you go, Miss Tubman.” She took a few steps back to properly introduce herself to this friend of John Brown. “I’m Ayomide from Azdavay.” She instinctively ended up performing a curtsy, an act that was still engrained within her from the maid café. Ayomide was under mind-control at that time, of course, but her body still remembered how she had been moved.

“Oh, what a nice young lady you are.” Tubman was a bit surprised at how refined Ayomide seemed. Her wearing clothes ‘borrowed’ from Sir Algernon, Lady Leila’s clothes were a tad bit large for her, made her look like she was supposed to be the owner of the estate they were standing on. A silk waistcoat and pants (Brown was shocked when he learned of the fact that woman wearing pants was common in Gemeinplatz) made Ayomide look uncomfortably sharp for her own tastes.

“Thank you, mistres- Ahem, Miss Tubman.” Ayomide had to stop herself from being overly formal. Her gaze shifted toward the strange hooded figures who had been standing quietly, watching them while they had been proceeding with the introductions. “...So, who are these people?” Ayomide pointed at the strangers.



“Oh, they?” Tubman turned around to meet her followers. “Come on, we’re with our allies. I don’t need to tell you to uncloak.”

The figure on the right took off her hood, revealing a face that Brown and Ayomide had ended up making themselves familiar with. “Sorry. Just a force of habit.” It was Kyauta. “Though, I don’t think introductions are necessary for me.”

Yes, I’ve been all to closely acquainted with you and your knife, thought Ayomide.

Brown knew Kyauta too, though not as closely as Ayomide, for she was a character that he had met in the first chapter of his life in this new realm. “Glad to see that the Holy Spirit guided you to safety and good company.”

“Indeed, I have been guided to a good place.” Kyauta, having stopped being in mission mode, found herself a chair to sit down and relax. “Vaiz, I believe it’s your turn.”

“Right! Right, it’s my turn.” The other figure who revealed himself was a young man. He looked out of place in this gathering of freed slaves, with his skin colored like fresh milk that had been left in the sun for too long. His eyes were crystal blue, like a clear river under daylight, and his locks had color that wouldn’t be off on the bark of a tree. His teeth were mostly intact, which was pretty rare in a land like Gemeinplatz where dentists were as common as unicorns on Mars.

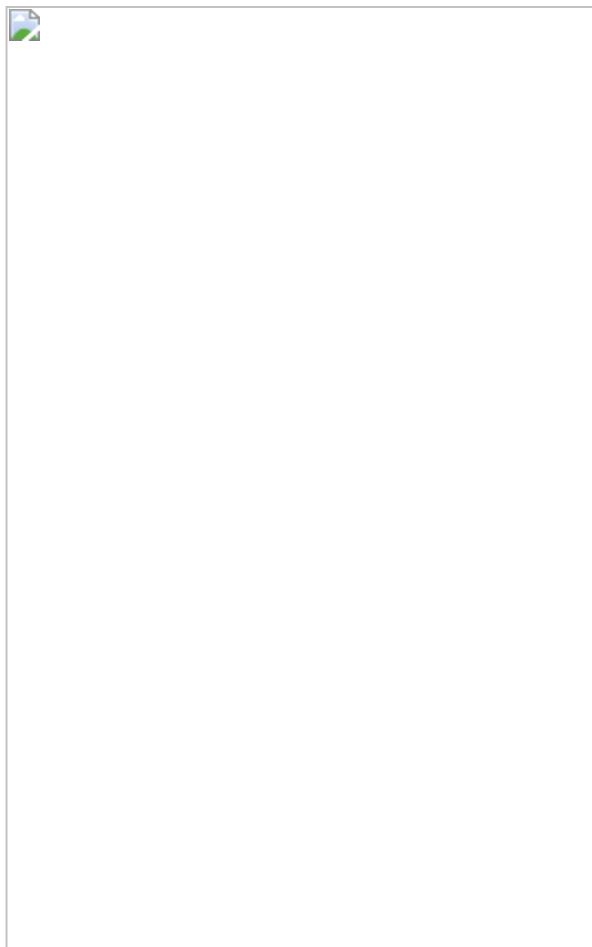
“I’m Vaiz, priest... or former priest of the Temple of the Divine. Peace be upon ye.” Vaiz acted timidly in his introduction, and his appearance was one of a young man from a well-off family who hadn’t seen much of the world yet. “They kicked me out when I tried to teach The Hallow Word to demi-humans, you see. The people of Casamonu didn’t take kindly to me doing that...”

“A priest?” Brown hadn’t been able to gather much information about religion in Gemeinplatz. He had no qualms working together with anyone of good character who professed abolitionism, regardless of creed. A younger Brown would have began arguing with this man over doctrine, an older Brown still planned to do so later in their free time, but with age had come wisdom as to when argument and debate was appropriate.

“Y-Yes, sir.” Vaiz took off the rest of the black robes to reveal the white robe of a priest. He took out a small skullcap from his pockets and put it on to complete his hallow outfit. “With Divine guidance, I intend to right the heretical doctrine of the Temple barring our darkskin and demi-human siblings from seeing the light.”

Vaiz seemed to gain a whole lot more fervor at the last part of his speech, casting off this timidity. Thus began, unbeknownst to many, a grand schism and reformation within the Temple of the Divine.

Note: The "certain someone" mentioned in the beginning quote is [Harriet Tubman](#). So, who's this Harriet Tubman that Brown's so acquainted with?



Harriet Tubman (born in the March of 1822) was an American abolitionist who began her life as a slave in Maryland. She was, like all the other slaves, abused greatly by her master and the overseer, and after having a heavy metal weight thrown at her head, Tubman began experiencing hypersomnia and strange visions that she thought were premonitions from God. As once can guess, direct communication from the Lord lead her to being deeply religious. She escaped in 1849, returning afterwards to rescue the rest of her family from enslavement. Tubman didn't stop with her family though, she continued to liberate slaves (around 70 of them) from the South and lead them to freedom in the North (either in the free states or slavery-free Canada). Her acts in freeing the enslaved made her come to be known as "Moses", in comparison to a particular prophet who lead the Israelites out of slavery.

"I bring you one of the best and bravest persons on this continent — General Tubman as we call her."

- John Brown introducing Harriet Tubman to [Wendell Phillips](#).

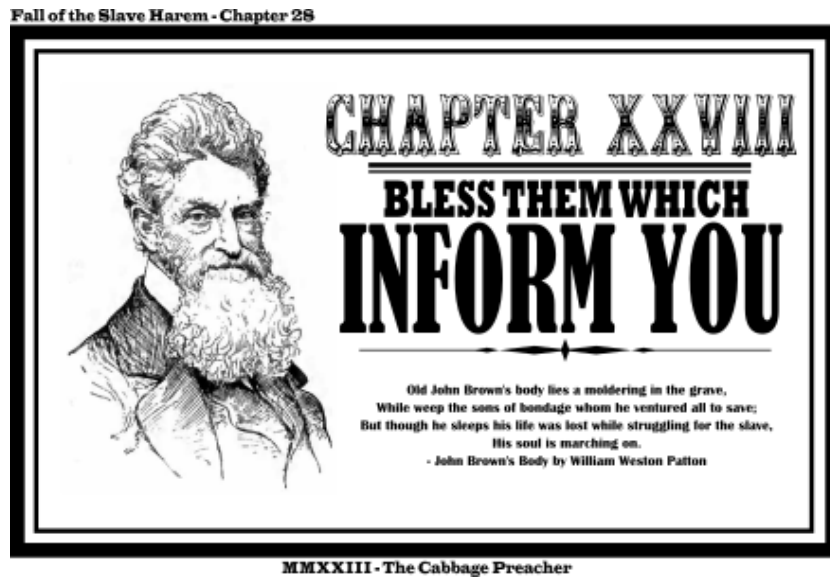
Tubman and Brown were acquainted in the April of 1858. She herself hadn't participated in violent action like Brown, but she agreed with his plan of action for the Raid on Harper's Ferry. Tubman agreed with helping Brown in terms of intelligence (as she had oft trodden the states between the North and South) and recruitment of the formerly enslaved for his planned rebellion. Unfortunately, Harriet Tubman wasn't present when the raid finally launched. There are several different theories put forward by historians as to why she might have been absent, some think she might have been going through a bout of illness due to her head injury, some say that she might have been busy recruiting even more people for Brown elsewhere. Tubman was illiterate, meaning that there are no records written by her.

After Brown's death and the beginning of the American Civil War, Tubman worked for the Union Army as a scout and a spy. She led the [Raid on Combahee Ferry](#), an expedition of 150 black troops, freeing another 700-800 slaves.

"Colonel Montgomery and his gallant band of 300 black soldiers under the guidance of a black woman, dashed into the enemy's country, struck a bold and effective blow, destroying millions of dollars worth of commissary stores, cotton and lordly dwellings, and striking terror into the heart of rebeldom, brought off nearly 800 slaves and thousands of dollars worth of property, without losing a man or receiving a scratch. It was a glorious consummation.... The colonel was followed by a speech from the black woman who led the raid and under whose inspiration it was originated and conducted. For sound sense and real native eloquence her address would do honor to any man, and it created a great sensation." - A contemporary newspaper reporting on the raid.

For her service, Tubman was never given a proper salary or any other form of compensation (can you guess why? It starts with "race" and ends with "ism"). She was in constant poverty for the rest of her life. She was able to scrape by, thanks to working various jobs and receiving support from her supporters. Only in 1899 did Congress approve to give her 20\$/month (8\$ from her pension and 12\$ for her service as a nurse), though her job as a scout and spy in the army wasn't acknowledged. Tubman passed from pneumonia in 1913 (her last words being "I go to prepare a place for you"), penniless, surrounded by friends and family.

Chapter 31: Chapter XXVIII – Bless them which inform you.



With their introductions to Brown done, Kyauta and Vaiz left the room to find accommodate themselves with the rest of the freemen, and to also make arrangements for their accommodation. Ayomide went out to help them, leaving the old acquaintances Brown and Tubman alone to catch up.

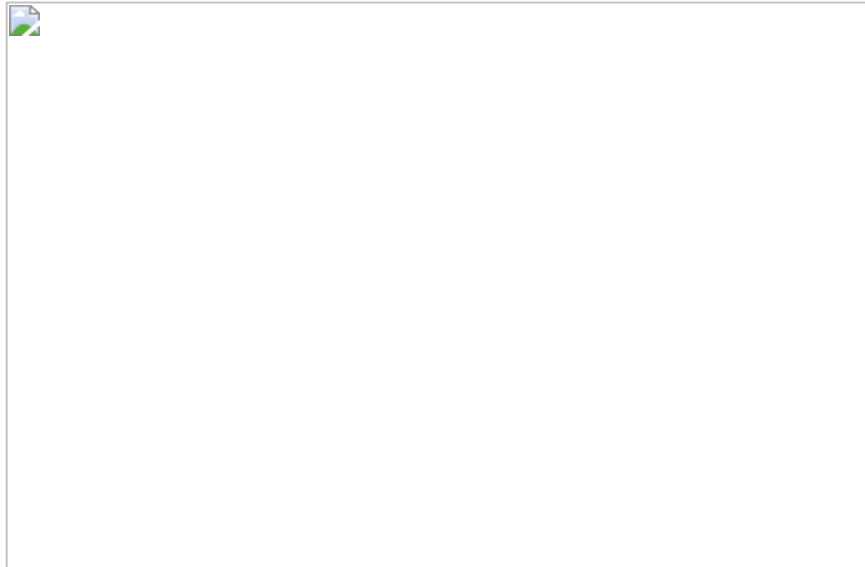
The two abolitionists sat across each other, with tea on the table to fuel discussion. Brown began, after putting down his cup and clearing his throat, their catching-up. “So... General Tubman. We haven’t seen each other for a long time.” Brown was a gentleman, not of the snobby noble kind but of the learned kind, who always made sure to have an air of humble formality. “We last met... I believe somewhere in the spring of 1858.”

“Yes, before you went on your divine mission to free the slaves.” It felt odd, for Tubman, to be talking about time. “I’ve seen the Lord, Mister Brown, and He has told me that we’d surely meet again. I thought that He was referring to Heaven, but...” She looked once more again at Brown, in disbelief. “God’s plan is mysterious as it is grand.

“Indeed, it is.” Brown did hold hope in his heart that he’d finally get to pass on to the afterlife after his mission on Gemeinplatz was done. He missed his family, whom most had already gained admission the Pearly Gates. “I assume that there was good reason for the absence of General Tubman at Harper’s Ferry?” He slowly shifted the topic to a sensitive question that had been bugging his mind since his capture at Harper’s Ferry.

“You have done more in dying than a hundred men would do in living. I wouldn’t have been absent if I could have helped.” Tubman took a sip out the tea to ready herself for the next part. “Truth is, I can’t recall much of that time. All I remember is a vision, of a wilderness. There, a serpent raised its head amongst the rocks there. Its head was that of an old man with a long white beard, looking at me wishfully. Two heads rose up, younger than he. A great crowd of men rushed to strike down the young heads, followed by the old one. I didn’t get what this meant, until I heard news of your capture and the death of your sons.”

Brown wasn't, despite what might one initially assume, the type to seek signs and fall into superstition. Even then, he couldn't ignore such clear symbolism. "A snake... I remember another too, in Maryland when we were setting up the house for the raid. Annie, my daughter, she and I were sitting one afternoon when we saw two wrens at the door."



"I approached the birds and their nest, only to find a snake poised to attack the bird's young. I killed the snake, to protect the nest, and I thought of it to be an omen of success in our upcoming fight for the slaves." Brown thought of the snake as having represented the evils of slavery, soon to be crushed before it could inflict further damage upon the innocent. It seemed, however, that the snake had been the one to bite him in America.

Tubman had another idea. "And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up." She quoted a relevant passage from the Gospel of John (3:14 to be exact). Tubman thought that, like the Savior, Brown had found salvation in his death. They had another chance to right what was wrong, this time in another world. "I think it is clear what the Lord intends."

Brown fell silent. He had already decided that his journey to another world was a divine mission, on the first day he arrived in Gemeinplatz in fact. These revelations didn't do anything but further steel his resolve. "I have had no doubt about that, General Tubman. Faith is dead without works; we shall strive to work wherever we are."

"That's the spirit, God bless you. It's good to see that old John Brown ain't dead." Tubman had been worried about the mental and spiritual state of Brown, considering how she herself had a hard time adjusting after being thrust into a foreign land.

"Speaking of dying, how did America fare after I left it?" Brown had wanted to learn more about this from Jacob, but the old man had rudely cut their conversation (and Jacob's neck) short. "I heard, from Sir Jacob who you might know, that there has been a civil war of some sort, and that the Northerners won."

"Ah, yes. I was intending to get there." Tubman rocked back and forth on her chair as she reminisced what had happened a while ago for her. "As I've said, you did what many couldn't by dying. Those 'masters' in the South were pretty afraid of a thousand more John Browns springing up and inciting rebellion in their lands. Eventually, after the election of a president who opposed the

expansion of slavery, the Southern states decided that they'd band together and secede rather than let the African be free."



"In my younger days, I had vainly thought that emancipation could be achieved without much bloodshed." Brown couldn't help but heave a deep sigh in reaction to the stubbornness and cruelty of his countrymen. "The fact that the Lord hasn't cracked the earth under us is only a sign of His mercy."

"Amen." Tubman couldn't help but agree, she herself wasn't sure how God hadn't lost His patience during the American Civil War. "Hundreds of thousands bled, to keep the Union intact. It was like Armageddon came to America. I fought there too, and in the end we did end up winning the war over the Confederacy, but not the war over liberation."

"You didn't win the war over liberation?" Brown was so shocked that he slammed the tea cup on the table. "What happened? Was slavery not abolished after all that bloodshed?" He was about to start preaching about eternal damnation if that was the case.



“You see, the old form of slavery was abolished. By a new amendment, in fact.” Tubman paused a bit, trying her best to remember it. “Neither slavery nor involuntary servitude, *except as a punishment for crime where the party shall have been duly convicted*, shall exist within the United States, or any place subject to their jurisdiction.” Tubman simply quoted the Thirteenth Amendment, not adding any further commentary.

“...except as a punishment for crime where the party shall have been duly convicted?” Brown could guess where this was going. “This makes the abolishment of slavery useless if states can hand out arbitrary punishments to put the freemen back into bondage!” Tubman didn’t respond; Brown understood that his guess was correct. “Oh, may God save our souls...”

Brown looked the most troubled he had been since he had arrived in Gemeinplatz. Even the bear attack hadn’t angered him this much, for a bear attacking was a part of its nature while humanity could choose a better way. “So, hundreds of thousands died, only for...” He couldn’t continue. It was too much for him.

John Brown wept, for there were no more ferries to raid.

Brown wanted to burn down the entirety of Congress, unfortunately for the millions in bondage but fortunately for the job security of congressmen, he was currently not in America. He’d have probably burnt down the rest of the country in righteous fury if he learned that the Thirteenth Amendment still worked the same way in the 21st century.

“Excuse me, General Tubman.” Brown got up from his seat. He wiped a few of his own tears with his hands. “I- I need a moment to calm down and pray to the Almighty.”

“No problem, Mister Brown.” Tubman got up as well. She also needed a moment of prayer.

The old man stormed out the room, determined to not let reconstruction in Gemeinplatz not go the way it did in America.



6th of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, Empire of Gemeinplatz

Kim Seong-min was back at the Count Leon's mansion, though he hadn't planned on being back here so soon. His sister Do-Yun sat beside him while they watched the summoned people fill the grand hall, the siblings surrounded by the mercenaries Kim had brought over from Korea. The count's summon had reached far and wide, and the high-ups of the duchy had made sure to answer the call swiftly in hopes of currying favor from their liege.

Kim was introducing the newcomers to his sister as they came. "This one's... he's the son of some local merchant. I don't remember his name." He wanted his sister to be ready to take over the company in case of an emergency, or at least help out with his work in the future. Do-Yun wasn't interested in politicking, but she was interested in court intrigue.

"Oh, he fits the role of a nameless background character perfectly!" commented Do-Yun. The merchant's son probably would have a few objections about that if he could understand the Korean language. "And who are those... Chinese guys?" Do-Yun's eyes followed a group of newly arrived men in white robes.

Upon the mention of the Chinese, Kim became a whole lot more dismissive and his mood suddenly got a whole lot worse. "They're just the cultivating loonies of Long Dong's sect." It had been a while since he had seen Dong's men. "Apparently he went out of isolation after hearing the count's summon." He kept a close eye on the sect members, who were standing around and talking to others in the hall. Kim had a bad feeling about what Dong might be planning.

"Make way for the Pavise Hero, Iwagaya Takafumi!" Kim's thoughts of suspicion were interrupted by the pompous entrance of one Japanese man, with an iconic pavise attached to his shoulder, and his harem of demi-humans. Everyone in the room groaned as they saw him enter. "So, what do you blue-blooded freaks want?" The room ignored Takafumi, and continued chatting away with each other.

However, someone else followed Takafumi. "Make way for the Dungeon Hero, Jonathan Brown!" He too, had a harem of demi-humans, though this harem was a bit smaller compared to Takafumi's one. Everyone in the room, especially Takafumi, groaned in great annoyance when they saw him enter. The room then continued to ignore Brown.

“Look at the new kid on the block, stealing my spot.” Takafumi walked up to Brown. They proceeded to argue verbally while everyone in the room did their best to continue ignoring them.

“That Pavise Hero sure is lively today.” Kim leaned back on his chair as if he was watching a game of football. He wished there was some popcorn he could snack on while watching them argue.

“He has the energy of an arrogant antagonist.” added Do-Yun. “Jonathan seems to minor to be an antagonist though, maybe he’d be a bully in the background.”

“Don’t underestimate that Jonathan guy.” said Kim, stopping his carefree leaning. “He’s only been in Gemeinplatz since the beginning of this spring, but he has already managed to become important enough to be summoned here.” Kim was a bit of an egoist, seeing himself a bit above everyone else, but he was also a businessman. The pragmatic, businesslike side of him felt danger when he was faced with Jonathan. “Jon must have a cheat skill allowing his ascent, but I have no clue as to what it might be. Presumably it has something to do with dungeons.”

Before Kim could audibly theorize further, the room suddenly calmed down. He stopped to look around to where everyone was looking at: the door. Count Leon had arrived.

“Make way for His Excellency!” The servant beside Leon entered the room, further announcing his arrival. Everyone important in the room obliged as they took a seat around the large table that covered the hall. Their servants stood beside them, there not being enough seats to seat all.

The count slowly made way for his position at the head of the table. He leisurely sat down, not because he was at leisure, but because he wanted to project an image of being calm and having the situation under control. “Now, you might be wondering why I gave gathered you all here today. Some of you may already know the reason as to why.”

“You have probably heard of the incident involving the uprising at Azdavay.” The hall was quieter than quiet at the mention of the exodus. “Do not worry, we’ve already arrested and dealt with the perpetrators. However, the fugitives remain at large, and they have captured a copper mine in the Curry Mountains, wantonly executed one of my knights, not to mention that they’re holding the knight’s family hostage.” Leon’s servant took out the letter from Sir Baha, and read it out loud. Sounds of shock and disdain reverberated throughout the room.

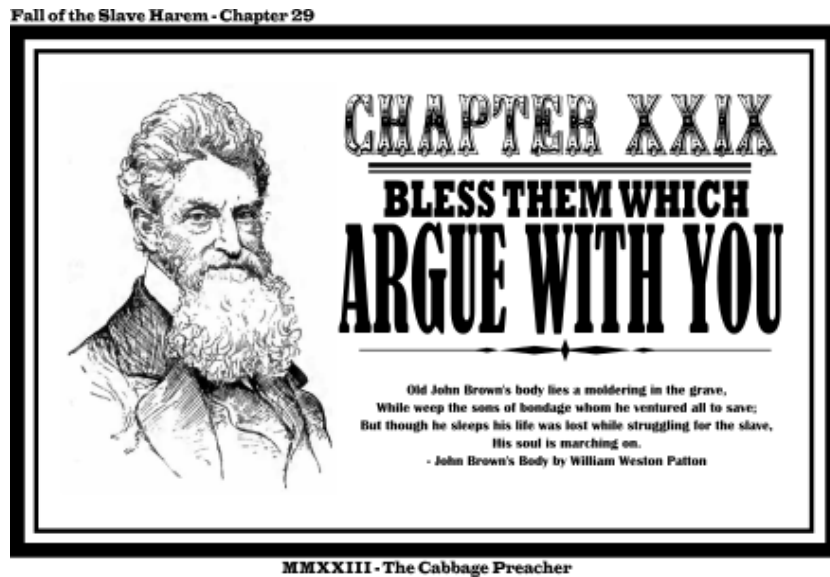
“These fugitives must be stopped, before they grow bolder and threaten to throw our entire county into anarchy. For the sake of the commonwealth of the realm, I ask you to lend the aid you’ve promised for anti-fugitive action.”

Extra historical context: The vision (of the snakes) shared by Harriet Tubman and the event (about the snake) shared by Brown are based on real accounts.

As Annie recalled, her father was not superstitious nor given to seeking after signs, but one incident took place that seemed to him almost classic biblical imagery. Brown and Annie were sitting together one afternoon when they heard the fluttering and twittering of two wrens at the door. When they went out to see the frantic birds, they found a snake had crawled nearby and was poised to strike at the young in their nest. Brown killed the snake, and later asked his daughter if she thought it was an omen of impending success in fighting on behalf of the slaves.

In her dream, Harriet Tubman saw a “wilderness sort of place, all full of rocks and bushes,” and a serpent raise its head among the rocks. The serpent became the head of an old man with a long, white beard, gazing at her “wishful like,” as if he was going to speak to her. Suddenly “two other heads rose up beside him, younger than he,” and as she wondered what they wanted with her, “a great crowd of men rushed in and struck down the younger heads, and then the head of the old man, still looking at her so ‘wishful.’” Only after she heard the news from Virginia, did Harriet Tubman finally understand the dream. John Brown’s raid on Harper’s Ferry had failed, and among the dead raiders were his sons Oliver and Watson. Brown had misread the meaning of the serpent as representing the evil of slavery, while Tubman intuitively understood the serpent in different biblical symbolism. Like the Savior with whom she later compared John Brown, the fiery serpent lifted up in the wilderness was a sign of salvation in death.

Chapter 32: Chapter XXIX – Bless them which argue with you.



All was not well on Baha's part. All was *not* well.

"Your cousin was executed, Your Excellency, I get your frustration..." However, he still had to get down on his knees and suck on the boots of his rightful liege. "...but, please, those savages have my sister! We could at least negotiate, wait for them to release her, and then attack!"

The council, much to Baha's disdain, was one of imminent war. It was not that Baha was a man of peace, definitely not, but he *was* a man of not having his immediate family die to a bunch of revolting savages. For all this petty lord knew, Leila's throat would be slit open the moment the scouts of his liege were seen circling around the mine. Not to mention the fate of her children...

"Yes, you do have my condolences." Leon wasn't having any of his vassal's pleading. "You see Sir Baha, these darkskins will be violating more than your sister if we let them continue their activities further." All of this uprising business was dangerous for the prospects of Leon getting to stay as a count. "It's for the good of the realm, I assure you."

"I- I..." Baha kept his head down low even while he rose up from his kneeling stance. There wasn't much of anything he could gain by arguing further. "Understood, Your Excellency." The petty lord bowed to his lord and left the room, heaving a deep sigh and muttering some quiet curses after he made sure that the door was closed.

Baha slowly made his way out of the count's castle, continuing to quietly complain when there wasn't any servants or guards that could hear him. "Even those bloody darkskins must have more honor than this prick." That was an odd thought to hear be said out loud, but Baha had lost much of his patience and trust against his liege.

A lord was supposed to protect his vassals, that was the whole shtick with feudalism and vassalage, but Leon had completely ignored that completely by sacrificing Baha's sister. Yes, Baha couldn't help but agree that defeating the fugitives sooner would be better for the commonwealth of the realm, but he also couldn't help but act irrationally when faced with losing someone so close to

him. *At least* the darkskins had, according to the observations of his servant, kept their side of the bargain.

What good was a liege who was no better than the so-called savages?

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

7th of Summer, 5859

**Former Estate of Sir Algernon (just find a new name already for God's sake), Azdavay /
Casamonu**

Summer had come to Northern Gemeinplatz, though Brown didn't exactly know what to make of this "summer". It wasn't like summer in Connecticut or Kansas, sweltering and humid, but it was a summer where the air kept cool and the rain rarely ceased. Even if Brown had never seen it, he had heard that the gentle cold breeze of Northern Gemeinplatz was owed to the "dark sea" neighboring them.

With the skilled hands of the freemen, the trench constructing plan had been completed without much of a hitch (except for Bilal almost breaking his pinky while instructing someone on how to swing a pick). The estate area was small, contributing to the lightning-quick pace of ditch construction. Now a small line of earthen brown snaked its way through the outskirts of the estate, separating the outside from the inside.

Brown, he himself having worked digging trenches for a couple hours before his old back became too sore to proceed, and the freemen looked proudly at the mounds of dirt that they had dug up. It was hard labor, the sort that they had been doing for the last few years now, but it was work for the sake of themselves and not someone else.

The question now was: What next?

The freemen had a whole lot more options now, especially thanks to the ransom so graciously delivered to them by Sir Baha. Instead of money, Brown had initially requested for items to be delivered with most of those items being various tools of labor and industry. He planned on kickstarting proper construction, though it'd take him a good while to teach these newly freed men to do jobs other than mining. Still, he believed that these hardworking folk wouldn't have a hard time learning anything given proper instruction.

"Now that we have taken our first step towards self-defense..." began Brown, turning to address the crowd. "...what else do you need?" It was a simple question, yet it was an important one. The old man wanted these people to govern themselves and truly be free, not for them to mindlessly listen to the words of some foreigner and accept Brown as their dictator-in-chief. The freemen would know best what they needed, all that was needed was for them to express and organize.

Hakim was the first one to raise a hand. "We're running low on firewood. I'll have to burn the furniture if we don't work on that." He looked around the crowd, before turning to newly-appointed foreman Bilal. "Your men can spend a bit of time chopping trees, right?"

Ayomide interjected before Bilal could reply. "We also need more of those copper spears. Having some ditch isn't going to help us."

The former maid Ekene further interrupted the foreman. "Most importantly, someone has been sneaking food off from the pantry! You know, we have limited food right now folks. We need to

ration rationally if we want to stay alive!”

Without the need for much intervention, the disorganized crowd began organizing themselves. Thus, from becoming free of the shackle, the freemen also began freeing themselves further in another way, a way that’d help them be free of lords in the future.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Of course, all of the work that the freemen needed to do wouldn’t begin instantly.

They were human after all (despite what some might claim) and humans need breaks. It was the middle of the day now, with the sun having risen right on top even if nobody could see it thanks to the clouds, and nobody really wanted to go back to hard labor after having completed one project.

So it was that the freemen had gathered today to fulfill a need that had gone unfulfilled: their spiritual needs. In a world unforgiving and hostile to them, pretending that there was a deity or were deities who cared about them made everyone less worried about their situation. Being less worried gave them strength to face their source of worry, which leads to gratitude against whatever they just prayed to, so on and so forth until you get belief and religion.

The scene inside the dining hall, where the freemen gathered as usual, was an odd one.

“Oh, how I prayed then, lying all alone on the cold damp ground; 'Oh, dear Lord', I said. I haven't got no friend but you. Come to my help Lord, for I'm in trouble!” On one corner was Brown and Kyauta, facing Tubman while she was giving a makeshift sermon in front of a makeshift cross. They were also accompanied by Ekene and Ejike, who had mostly tailed them out of curiosity as to what these “Krischuns” were doing.

“Let me remind you that the duty of a good Believer is to let his dear man stand free, free to face the Divine whoever he might be! Now, let me tell you the story, one that they skip over in the Temple, of a freed slave who was a dear companion to our Prophet...” On the opposite corner were Vaiz and his new followers, with Bilal and a few of the other freemen sitting on the floor while listening to him.

On the complete opposite to this soup of belief sat Ayomide, Hakim, Tater and their big band of folk who didn’t care about either group. Having your family unceremoniously be torn apart, a common fate for any slave, wasn’t conducive to religious instruction of any kind. This neutral group prayed in their own unique ways, counting through a prayer bead, or rubbing a particularly lucky coin, or perhaps reciting bits of prayer to various deities and non-deities.

Thus was the odd syncretic environment in the former estate, one of Christianity, of the Divine Temple, and of folk religion side-by-side. Of white, Brown, and black united in common cause. A microcosm showing what might, perhaps, be the future in the macrocosm of Gemeinplatz. A future that’s frightening for some, exciting for others, currently not even imaginable by most.



The various groups finished their prayers, and dissolved to spend their free time at leisure. Leisure, in this case, meant very different things for very different people. Brown himself preferred to never spend time being idle, idleness being a broad term in his puritan book, and his activities consisted of sport and education (of others and himself). Ayomide was usually the one being educated by Brown, though thankfully she managed to stave off Bible study and Earth history thanks to the addition of new people for Brown to talk to. She either practiced with the M1 or she ran around the estate grounds to keep herself fit. Ayomide was doing just that, until she encountered a newly familiar sight approaching the estate.

“Evening, Ted.” It was the servant of Sir Baha, bringing them another installment of ransom. “Beware the ditches, you don’t want your horse to fall down there.”

Ted stopped his horse, barely in time for the animal not to fall in and break its legs. “When... When did you darkskins construct a fucking trench?!” Darkskins were supposed to be lazy, or so he thought. Stashing away his racist thoughts for a moment, Ted got off the horse to present a large bag of money. “This is all we can muster right now. Turning assets into liquid cash isn’t easy.”

Ayomide took the bag, and found cash in it that was clearly solid. “...I’m pretty sure this isn’t liquid anything. Are you trying to scam us?”

“No- It’s a financial term, for...” Ted quickly gave up on explaining. “It’s cash nonetheless. May I see the mistress?”

“No matter how many times you see her, she isn’t going anywhere.” Ayomide still accompanied the man into the main building nonetheless, to the upstairs where Leila’s room lay. “Please make your meeting quick, I don’t want to waste my leisure time with your lightskin business.”

Ted didn’t respond. He opened the door to the room, finding Leila who was clearly still alive much to his relief. “Mistress! Are you fine?”

Leila responded the same way she had responded before. “Fine as one can reasonably be in such a situation.” She was currently dying of boredom, being confined into one room and all, other than that nothing of note had happened to her. “The children are fine as well, thank the Divine.”

“That’s good, that’s good.” Ted took out a letter from his pocket. He glanced over to Ayomide to see if she was okay with him handing it over.

Ayomide snatched the letter, examining it with her hands to make sure that nothing sharp (like a weapon) was stashed inside it. She didn’t send any magic coming off of it either, an enchanted

paper causing something like an explosion would be quite troubling, so she gave the letter back to Ted without causing any further problems for him.

From Ted the letter passed on to Leila, from Leila the letter passed on to the table to be read later, from the table the letter passed nowhere because letters (usually) do not move by themselves. “It’s a letter from your brother.” Ted bowed down to his mistress. “He’s currently doing his best to gather the funds for your ransom.”

Leila thought that his brother was slow, but she also knew the fact that he was lacking in financial matters. “Has he petitioned Count Leon yet? I’d think that the count could help him in this situation.”

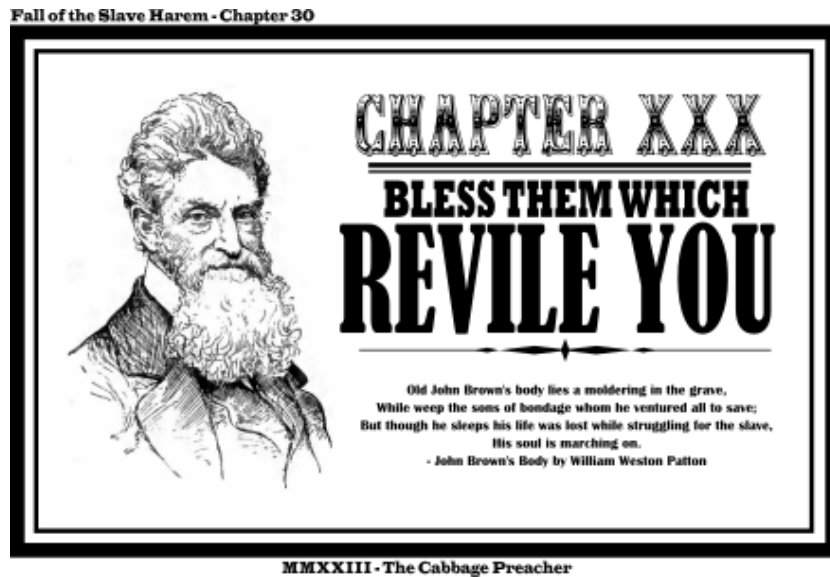
“That...” Ted didn’t look willing to continue this conversation further. His eyes shifted to Ayomide, then the door. “That... I have to go, mistress. I shouldn’t overstay my welcome here.”

“Right...” Ted and Leila parted ways quickly as they had met. The mistress watched, from the window, as Ayomide led Ted outside and the butler jumped on his horse and disappeared into the woods once more.

With the servant gone, Leila’s attention was once more taken by the letter. There was nothing else she could do to entertain herself, so opening the letter was her only choice.

The seal of the letter broke as it opened, and so did she.

Chapter 33: Chapter XXX – Bless them which revile you.



Ayomide had woken up today, on the wrong side of the bed to be exact. Somebody had left one of the windows open in the barracks and the breeze had frozen her back stiff during the night. She cursed the person who had made her sleep a living hell.

However, her troubles were not to be over. She was making her way to Lady Leila's room, with food as usual, when she heard awful noises coming from the room: cries and moans of pain. Plenty of them, and Ayomide worried, at least a little bit, whether the former mistress was dying back there. The abolitionist catgirl ran into the room, praying that their source of ransom wasn't about to end further existence.

She gently opened the door to see that, visually at least, Leila was fine. There was no blood or anything, so things didn't seem to be too bad. The woman was clutching to her belly, too busy being in pain to say anything coherent to Ayomide.

"Oh... is this what I think it is?" Ayomide didn't need Leila's response to understand what was happening. *Shit. What do I do?* Being an abolitionist catgirl wizard was a completely separate branch of business compared to midwifery. "Uhm... Uhm..." Now she was panicking as well, this situation was somehow more stressful compared to impaling the overseers with javelins. At least she knew how to deliver a javelin, delivering babies was a whole lot more delicate of a job.

An idea struck Ayomide. *Right, didn't Brown have twenty children or something? He should know at least a little bit about midwifery... or would it be midhusbandry in his case?* With this she ran out of the room, leaving Leila alone while she hunted for a suitable abolitionist with a particular set of skills.



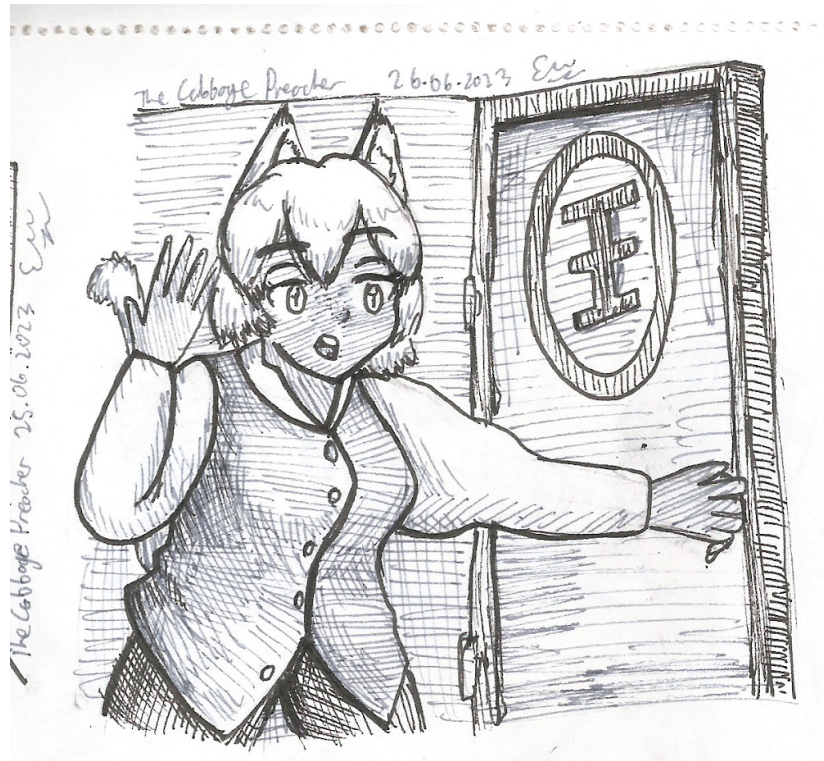
Old John Brown and Harriet Tubman were back in the estate's office, planning plans of future abolition and having theological debates as to the nature of the universe that they had found themselves in. By now, they had come to an agreement that the Lord had most likely created realms

other than Earth, and that they were just in one of many realms that was found in the grand painting that was Creation.

They hadn't, however, come to full agreement as to their future plan for action. Brown was adamant on being bold, and continuing to take offensive actions like the capturing of the copper mine that they were currently occupying. Tubman, on the other hand, wanted to go in a more covert manner until they were a whole lot more powerful as an organization.

Their talks had come to a gridlock, so there was currently silence. Brown intended to break it, so he found something to change the topic. "General Tubman, w-"

"Old man! General!" Ayomide crushed Brown's dream of conversation when she crashed into the room. "I need you to make a child!"



...

"Excuse me?!" The two abolitionists were unsure as to how to reply to such a request.

"I mean-" Ayomide's tongue had slipped and fallen into a cliff out of panic. She was still panting from having to metaphorically fly up the stairs, and her brain was still lacking sufficient oxygen. "I need you to *deliver* a child! The captive's giving birth!"

"Oh! You mean something like that, young lady." Brown was happy that he was not being requested to copulate so suddenly. He was still, technically, a married man for God's sake! "I'm afraid that I lack experience in the field of midwifery." Back in his time, midwifery was definitely a woman's job, and Brown hadn't studied deeply into it. He looked toward Tubman for help.

"I'm afraid I ain't got the experience either." Tubman shook her head. "I haven't given birth to any children of my own. Kyauta hasn't either." Being an Underground Railway operator was, just like being an abolitionist catgirl wizard, a completely different field from midwifery.

“Great...” Most of the people in the estate were miners, who definitely didn’t participate in midwifery. Shinasi was an adventurer / professional winesop, Hakim was a cook, and Tater was a kid. *Why did this woman have to give birth right now?!* “Alright, what do we do now?”

Brown had a brilliant plan. “We pray to the Lord and...” He got up from his seat. “...do our best not to mess up.”

This plan didn’t seem too satisfactory to Ayomide, but she didn’t have a better plan either. *I think that the Lord has abandoned us at this point...* “Then...”

“Let’s be quick!” Tubman had a better plan. “Come on, that baby ain’t delivering itself!” She hurried out the door to Leila’s room. Brown and Ayomide followed her in her swiftness. Brown paused in front of the door, causing Ayomide to pause as well. “You aren’t going in, old man?”

“Lord forbid, I’m not going to be staring at a woman while she gives birth.” That’d be a tad bit too sinful considering that involved seeing parts that shouldn’t be seen by a gentleman. “Call me if you need anything delivered to the room.”

“Alright...” *You do what you wanna do, old man.* With this, Tubman and Ayomide went into the room while Brown leaned on the wall, praying most fervently for a safe birth. Leila was technically their captive, the widow of a whose thoughts were most likely much less than savory, but a good Christian like Brown would not hesitate to bless those who reviled him.

While leaning on the wall, Brown could easily overhear the commotion coming from inside the room. “General, we should probably let her lay do-” *Crash!* “Crap! That wasn’t too expensive, was it?”

“Miss Ayomide, now is not the time to worry about that!” Tubman admonished Ayomide, and sounds of broken shards crunching under their shoes could be heard. “The baby comes out of here, just pull up her dress so the way’s clear.”

“This feels way too creepy... Wait, is that the baby’s head?!” Ayomide screamed out of shock. “Ah! The hell is this?!” This only served to stress Leila further, who was still wailing in pain.

“Don’t be needlessly uncouth, Miss Ayomide!” Saying ‘hell’ was definitely not acceptable, even in such a stressful situation. “It’s moving down... Alright, push!”

“*Wow*, it looks *ugly*.” She sounded genuinely surprised. “I thought that babies were supposed to be cuter, and not covered in slime.”

“Miss! Stop being rude toward other people’s children and help me get this baby out!” It seemed that Tubman was slowly running out of patience.

“I can’t move it further! There’s a hose of flesh stuck to its tummy.” Ayomide was further creeped out by the baby, but she didn’t dare make any further disparaging comments lest she incur the wrath of Tubman.

“I think we have to cut that one.” Tubman popped her head through the door to meet old Brown. “Knife.” She extended an empty hand, which was quickly filled by Brown’s trusty knife courtesy of Watanabe Generico (remember him?). Tubman popped back in as quickly as she had popped out.

“Wait, we’re just going to cut- Just like that?!” Ayomide wasn’t exactly used to seeing impromptu incisions to human flesh. Spawning new humans was a whole lot messier than she had initially thought. “And... That’s a whole sac of flesh that just came out of her. Holy...”

“That’s called ‘placenta’, if I remember correctly. The baby’s bit quiet-” Tubman’s thoughts were interrupted by the newborn crying so loudly that everyone in the room (and even Brown outside the room) thought that their eardrums would rupture to a thousand pieces. “Alright, it... he’s alive. Brown, you can come in!”

Brown came in to the room, to see that the once elegant bedroom had turned into a huge mess. There were the shards of a broken vase on the floor, a wet carpet thanks to said broken vase, along with other bits and bobs knocked and moved during the chaos. Ayomide was sitting on the couch, looking up to the ceiling in a manner that suggested she was most exhausted. She wasn’t expecting so much action today. Tubman was looking around for some sort of towel to clean her hands of fluids that needn’t be mentioned in further detail, and the newborn infant was seated on Leila’s chest.

“Thank the Lord, it seems that you are all fine.” Brown’s comment gained a sarcastic glare from Ayomide.

“Yes, I’m *very* fine as you can see.” Ayomide had only one question left in her mind after witnessing the wonders of childbirth: *Why the hell do people willingly have children?!* She was glad to be the one peacefully sitting on the sofa, not having to worry about doing whatever had just happened in front of her. “Huh, what’s this?” There was a letter that had been left on the armrest. “Oh, it’s the letter that the butler just gave.”

“Stop...” Leila tried to rise up to meet Ayomide, before she remembered there was an entire baby currently occupying her. “...Or... It doesn’t matter if you read it. It’s not like I can do anything to save myself.” She seemed somber all of a sudden, for a good reason. “We’re all dead men here.”

“Huh?!” Leila got the same reaction out of everyone else in the room. Ayomide rushed to open the letter. Confronting the letter’s letters, she remembered the fact that she was illiterate. “Old man, could you?”

Brown snatched the letter from Ayomide. He began reading its contents out loud. “Dear sister, I hope that you are doing your best despite these troubling times. May the Divine give you patience, and...” Its contents, on the front page, were mostly intrafamilial fluff. However, when Brown turned the paper over, he saw another thing.

Instead of letters written in ink like usual, there were letters written in something that had burnt down. The paper smelled vaguely like citrus, oranges to be exact, which revealed the nature of this simple invisible ink that had been made visible. The writing on the page with invisible ink was a whole lot cruder as the sender wasn’t able to clearly see their writing during the process.

All of this work preparing invisible ink had actually gone to waste, as Ayomide hadn’t inspected the contents of the letter in the first place. Sir Baha had simultaneously underestimated and overestimated the freemen on that front. Brown was a bit angry that they hadn’t managed to catch something as simple as invisible ink made from orange juice.

Dear sister. I regret to infourn inform you that the count has decided to not wait for you to be released. He’ll be coming coming with his army soon.

May murcey mercy be granted to our souls.

“That’s way earlier than I thought. Huh.” Brown took a good look around the room. Ayomide’s face looked like she was done with life, so did the face of Leila, while Tubman retained her slight scowl as usual. Unlike them however, Brown didn’t seem to be affected.

“Old man, aren’t you supposed to be panicking right now?! I’ve only had a couple days to drill those thirty or so slaves, and there’s only a little trench to hold back whatever that count throws at us!” Ayomide was righteously freaking out a bit over the prospect of being attacked by a proper army.

Brown continued as calmly as he had done before. “That just means that we’re just going to have to advance our plan in a quicker pace.” He threw the letter back on to the armrest. “It’s a shame that we’re not getting the full ransom, but we’ll have to content ourselves with what Providence has deemed suitable for us. The Lord eventually rewards the righteous, one way or another; keep this in mind young lady.”

“...and he’s currently *rewarding* us with certain death?” This Lord didn’t exactly seem to be of the consistent sort. “We can’t win against the forces of a count!”

Brown revealed a slight smirk, committing the sin of pride. “We can and, God willing, we will.”

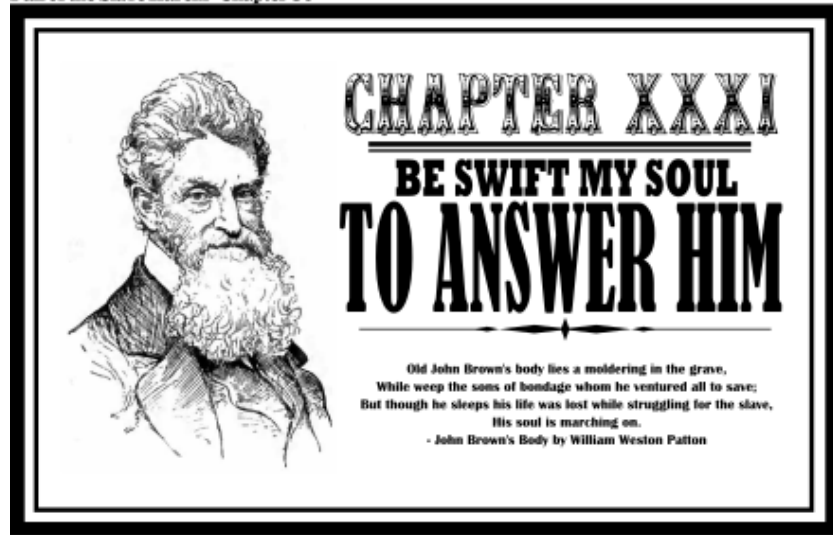
And Ayomide revealed a raised brow. “...how are we going to face such a force?”

Brown’s answer was suitably laconic:

“We aren’t.”

Chapter 34: Chapter XXXI – Be swift, my soul, to answer him!

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 30



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher



9th of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, Empire of Gemeinplatz

Count Leon had done it. He had, with diplomacy of upmost adroitness, gathered a force without much financial strain.



Favors, politicking, a whole lot of letters and some threats later, a force consisting of a hundred men had gathered in his castle's garden. This "army" definitely wasn't big, but the count didn't need anything big to take care of a few errant slaves hiding in the mountain. It consisted of indebted adventurers, retainers of close noble houses, and donated troops from those wishing to gain the favor of the count.

The count rode atop his horse, inspecting his little army with pride. Of course, he himself would also be participating in the battle... as a commander staying in the backline. Getting his own hands dirty wasn't in line with how Leon operated, nor was he an experienced military commander. He had delegated command to those who had brought the forces, which was more than good enough for a force that was meant to beat down a few lightly armed slaves.

How he operated did include speeches though. "Men! You are doing a great service to the county today." Leon's horse moved to-and-fro to make sure that everybody could hear at least a little bit of his speech. "Those savages up in the mountains have been terrorizing this land for a while now, terrorizing our spouses and children. Today we shall say 'No more!' as we drive these uppity darkskins off of Curry and into an otherworld!" The count raised his sword, and pointed it toward Mount Curry.

His speech hadn't exactly motivated the men too much. None of them were all too motivated from vague notions of "protecting the realm" and "uppity darkskins". What motivated them was whatever reward laid ahead after their job was done: fame, reputation, and most importantly, sweet dosh.

"Now, as you may all know, the former owner of the mine we're about to head off to has been brutally murdered by the fugitives." Leon wasn't done with his speech, however. He continued to ride around while keeping his sword pointed towards the mountain. "Whoever, at the end of the battle, brings me the most heads of these fugitives dead or alive shall receive this land and the honor of knighthood!"

This promise was a whole lot more motivating. The men's reluctance turned into enthusiasm at the prospect of nobility and owning a mine for themselves. "Your Excellency! What about the slaves we capture?" This question came from an old adventurer in the audience.

“You can do whatever you’d like to your captives. Own them, sell them, kill them...” Leon had truly gotten the attention of the crowd now. They seemed pretty excited to get to looting the human chattel of the abandoned estate. “Let me remind you that we won’t get to do that if we don’t march.” This prompted a few laughs from the crowd. Leon led his horse towards the gate of his castle. “Forward, march!”

With his command, the disorganized mess of men organized themselves into a loosely column-shaped line of men; it was impossible to march in formation effectively without training, nor was professional military training a common occurrence in Gemeinplatz. They didn’t need fancy formations for what they were about to do anyways. A hundred armed men could defeat whatever measly force had taken control of the mine.

They knew not what, or who, they were facing...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



9th of Summer, 5859
Mount Curry, Casamonu

It was a foggy and rainy day as usual in Mount Curry, and marching through it was quite a bother. This was especially true if one was marching with a hundred people in tow.

Just one person pausing due to the mud meant that everyone behind them had to stop while they got their precious boots unstuck. The mountain road was quite narrow, meaning that nobody could reroute when anyone in front of them had to pause. Reduced visibility in the fog meant that there were quite a few false alarms: a few errant farmers and miners had almost been murdered on the spot by paranoid adventurers. Thankfully, the count’s army had managed to keep the number of civilian casualties to a somewhat acceptable 2, the casualties being a goatherd and his dog. The men quickly buried the bodies before anyone had time to have any bothersome qualms about what they had done, to get them out their sight and out their mind.

The march was quite slow thanks to these problems, and the small army had barely made it halfway toward their goal by the time the day ended. As the sun went down so did their enthusiasm to march any further. Camp was set up on the road, for they had failed to find a plateau to settle down for the night. The night began, with the men flanked by darkness and mountains.

“Shakira, come here. I think I’ve finally found a spot.” Among the ones in camp was a familiar figure, that of Shakir and his adventuring companion. He had been looking for somewhere safe and reasonable to settle for the rainy night, and he had found a spot under a few trees that seemed to have stayed dry.

“Coming!” Shakira ran toward the spot, still carrying her ridiculously large sword. Everyone who she ran across turned their heads to gaze at the sword, wondering how the hell she had carried it all the way. Most of them concluded that it must be some sort of magic metal that was lightweight, like mithril, but this was false. Shakira was indeed carrying a weapon made out of run-of-the-mill steel. She was able to carry it thanks to fantasy logic that’d take way too long to expost.

The adventuring pair sat on the grass as they sat down to take a breather. Shakir and Shakira put down all their worldly possessions that they had been carrying. “Damn that Shinasi. He’d at least help us carry all this.” Shakir grumbled while his old legs wept tears of joy from all the weight that had been lifted off of them.

“If he hadn’t disappeared.” added Shakira. They still hadn’t figured out where that man had gone off to. It was most likely to escape some grave debt he had accumulated while under influence of foreign chemicals (a.k.a. alcohol). On the topic of debt, the financial situation of Shakir and Shakira had worsened considerably since they had lost their one and only tank.

The pair stayed like this for a while, voicing a few complaints here and there while they waited for sleep to finally take them. It didn’t take long, however, for visitors to show up. Shakir saw a small group, of what looked to be a petty nobleman and his retinue, show up to construct a tent next to them.

The servant of this nobleman approached the adventurers. “Could you please move to somewhere else?” It seems that the petty noble had eyes on their place of rest. There wasn’t much that Shakir and Shakira could do, so they got up to find somewhere else.

“Wait a second, Ted.” The nobleman leading the group stopped his servant. “We should have enough room in the tent. Let them stay with us for the night.”

“Yes sir.” Ted immediately changed his tone to be a whole lot less dismissive of the adventurers. “Help us set up the tent, if you could.” He handed Shakir(a) a couple of stakes to be staked down.

“Thank you, sir, for your generosity.” The pair bowed down to their overlord in a sense of slight genuine gratitude. A large tent was quickly set up with their help, and they all got inside to breathe a sigh of relief. Not being under the rain felt great.

What felt a whole lot greater was the drinks brought out by Ted, who handed everyone a cup filled with suitably high-class wine. Cups clanged together as everyone in the tent cheered.

“Thank you again sir, for letting us stay dry tonight.” Shakir retracted his cup and took a sip. He was understandably nervous; someone like him didn’t get to frequently dine with the upper class. “I’m Shakir, and she is Shakira. It’d be a pleasure to know the name of the one keeping us dry.”

“I am Sir Baha Earlywatch, loyal knight of His Excellency.” This nobleman was truly petty, only having a knighthood and a meagre amount of land and wealth.

Shakira paused upon hearing their host’s name. “Earlywatch? Wasn’t your sister, Lady Leila, married to the mine’s owner?” Leila’s predicament was pretty well known thanks to Leon having

revealed it to everyone in his court.

Baha didn't answer, showing that he didn't wish to discuss this matter further. He sufficed by staring emptily towards particularly nothing. The petty noble did actually have a lot of things to say, but most of his thoughts would amount to treason against the count. Unlike Algernon, Baha still had a head that he had to keep attached to his shoulders.

Shakir noticed the awkward environment. He coughed in an attempt to cut the silence. "Let's not speak about distasteful topics like that, Shakira."

"Right! Right." Shakira shook herself upon noticing the faux pas she had just committed. "Sorry about that, sir." She prayed that she hadn't offended the nobleman in front of her, and he eyes drifted toward the ground to avoid the noble stare of Baha.

"You are excused." Baha was a petty noble only in the material sense of the word "petty". He didn't intend to lash out on some rude adventurers. That wouldn't help out his situation by much. "Your... our job is to clear fugitives. That's it. You needn't ponder too much." Baha himself had only participated in hopes of winning a crumb of favor from the count, perhaps convincing him to hand over the estate to a member of the Earlywatch family. He didn't actually intend to join the fight when he arrived at the estate.

"Yes, glorious battle! As glorious as a battle against a bunch of darkskins can be, anyways." Shakir laughed at his own joke as he gulped down the wine. "You know, we've only gone to battle against monsters in the mountains. I guess we can consider this as a dungeon raid, considering there's little difference between a monster and a darkskin." This time Shakira and Ted joined in laughing at this cheap joke. Baha found less humor in it; he had a teeny tiny issue with making jokes about a place that probably contained his sister's corpse at this very moment.

"Ah! By the way, by the way..." Ted had decided to get a speaking role in this chapter. Being tipsy did wonders to his sociability. "...you know, there's some pretty good loot to be found in that place. I'm speaking as a fellow adventurer here, albeit a former one."

"Oh? What kind?" Shakira got a whole lot livelier at the mention of loot. She leaned a bit closer towards Ted to hear him more clearly.

"I'm talking about the darkskins, you know." Ted had gotten a chance to take a much closer look at the residents thanks to having been the one to attempt negotiating. He leaned back while reminiscing of the freemen he had seen. "Most of them are miners, the strong muscular kind. I've seen those sell for a lot on the market, laborers are always in demand."

Shakir nodded along. "I've seen them sell for a lot as well. He made plans to use a bit of magic to knock some slaves unconscious for capturing. *Perhaps I should bring along some rope...*

Two remarkable figures among the slaves suddenly jumped into Ted's head. He leaned forward, to better address his interested audience. "And, and, there was also a slave that looked like a lightskin among them." Slaves with lighter skin weren't an impossibility, there was often intermingling (to put it politely) that resulted in mixed children. "Those go for a lot of money, you know. Along with him, there was also a female demihuman, of the catgirl kind, among the slaves. I believe she'd also amount to a nice sum of money, if you don't intend on keeping her yourself." Ted sent a wink toward Shakir while saying the last part.

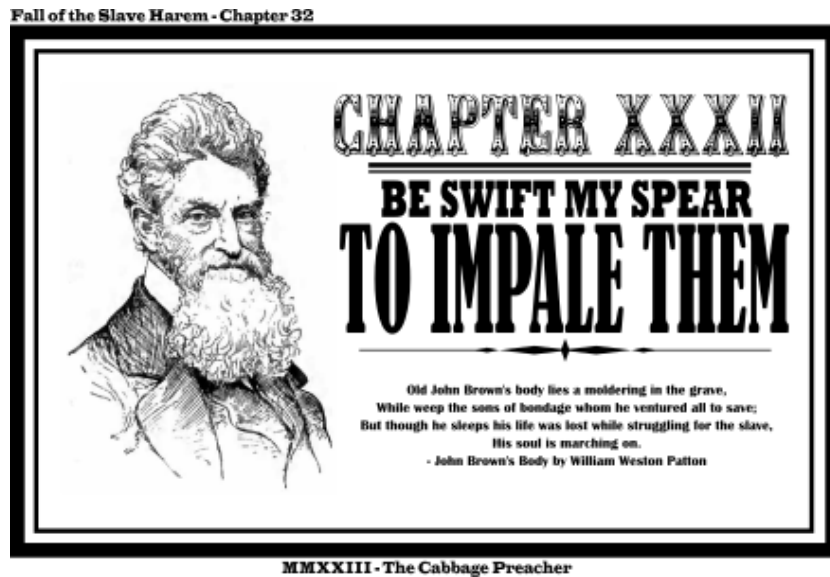
“Mm? A catgirl in the mines?” Shakir’s brow trended upwards. “I haven’t seen their kind be used often for manual labor.” He quickly realized what this implied but kept quiet. Noblemen keeping enslaved mistresses, even whole personal harems, was an openly known secret; implying that the cousin of the count did just that wasn’t a thing that Shakir was about to do. Still, a catgirl didn’t sound too bad. “Maybe I’ll-”

Suddenly, a javelin tore through the tent’s roof and skewered Shakir’s head. His entire body went limp. A cup of wine rolled on the floor, ruining the tent’s flooring, not to mention the blood and other brain matter that had found itself on the wrong side of Shakir’s skull.

Everyone in the tent screamed in unison upon seeing a man dying in front of them. They weren’t alone in screaming, for they were joined by other men from outside the tent.

Hell had suddenly broken loose.

Chapter 35: Chapter XXXII – Be swift my spear, to impale them!



Tonight was a beautiful night like any other. Scant rays of moonlight shimmered through the clouds, resulting in quite an enchanting scene if one were to stop and look around in the rain. Crickets chirped in a manner that stood between a chorus and straight up cacophony, somehow managing to be calming instead of annoying.

Under the moonlight was enslaved maid café waitress turned abolitionist catgirl wizard Ayomide, leading men into battle as they skewered their enemies from above. “Alright, ready? Fire!” Her shouts resonated throughout the mountains, though her voice was drowned out by the chaos below. Another slew of spears made their way down under their command, only adding to the death and destruction occurring below them.

Their enemy below couldn’t see them, as Ayomide’s group carried no sources of light. Even then, they stayed on a cliff that overlooked the section where the count’s men had camped. There was only road leading from Casamonu to the top of Mount Curry, so finding them wasn’t too hard.

What’d usually be hard would be leading a group of men in the dark. It was already hard to see under the moonlight for your average human, not to mention the lack of moon or light due to the congregation of never-ending rainclouds.

However, Ayomide was no human.

This was why she had been chosen to lead this ambush: cat(girl)s had the ability to see in the dark. Her group had slowly managed to find their way thanks to the guidance of their semi-feline captain.



Brown, of course, had also joined this ambush. He thought that it'd be quite rude to cozy himself up in the estate while the freemen were fighting. "I wish we had catgirls back in the United States!" he shouted while sending another spear down the cliff. "You would have helped me out a lot in Kansas." Having night vision was quite a significant advantage in warfare; one that'd not be realized on Earth until World War II (which Brown had no idea about). The cogs in old Brown's head had already begun turning upon realizing that he had this sort of advantage, and he was capitalizing on this advantage right now.

The freemen didn't know how many they had felled, for all they knew all their shots had missed, but they didn't intend to face such a force anyways. This was mostly an attack to sow fear, cause confusion, and *maybe* rack up some casualties on the enemy side. It seemed to be working, judging from the sounds of screams, shouts, and small explosions coming from down below.

Suddenly, the dark night sky was lit up by a small ball of light flying up to the sky from the camp.

"They're casting flares!" Ayomide stated the obvious as she had to shield her eyes from the overwhelming light. Becoming visible under light would be quite bad for their prospects of survival. "Old man, we should retreat!" A few more balls of light joined the fray while she was trying to inform Brown.

Brown couldn't answer for a few seconds. He and everyone else had been stunned by the sudden lightshow. Something like this, Brown thought, could be used as a weapon in the future. Having invented the concept of a flashbang, Brown quickly reoriented himself back to the environment. "Indeed we should. Retreat!"

"Alright, just hold my hand people." The ambushing squad locked their hands together in a chain that eventually led back to Ayomide, who functioned as a living-and-breathing night vision equipment. This was how they had made their way to here without being lost, and this was also how they'd make their way back. "We ready?"

“I believe we’re ready, young lady. With our Heavenly Father watching over us, let us skedaddle!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

“Is it over?” Count Leon reluctantly peeked out from under the shield of one of his retainers. The rain of spears, unlike the usual rain in Northern Gemeinplatz, seemed to have ceased completely.

However, the chaos in camp hadn’t ceased.

Men were still running around, shooting arrows, bolts and magic towards the mountains flanking them in hopes of hitting their assailants. Leon wasn’t too surprised: this was to be expected from an army he had gathered on the cheap. What surprised him was the boldness of the freemen in attacking a superior force. It seemed that those savages were not going to go down without a fight.

No matter the fighting spirit of the fugitives, Leon first had to restore order in his camp. “Hilmi! Are you alive?”

“Yes, sir!” Hilmi, Leon’s servant and right-hand man, crawled from under another shield. “Do you need me to...” He nodded towards the entrance to the tent they were in, where one could see what was happening outside.

“Yes, I need you to calm the men down.” Leon liked Hilmi, for he always knew what his liege wanted. “Also, try to get a preliminary count of the casualties.”

“Right away, sir.” Hilmi got up, dusted his clothes, and went outside. There he got on his stead, and rode around while shouting for men to calm the hell down in the name of their lord. The cacophony outside slowed down, and things seemed to go back to normal when Hilmi entered the tent once more. He presented his report based on the observations he had made while riding around. “There seem to be a few casualties, along with a whole lot more who were wounded during the chaos.”

“As I expected.” This report didn’t contain anything that Leon couldn’t have figured out by taking a peek outside. “Get some men to guard the high-up places.” Setting up simple patrols hadn’t crossed his mind before. The count wasn’t exactly what one might call a “military genius”. “We’ll keep marching on as usual when dawn breaks.” He then went back to bed without saying anything else.

“Understood, sir.” Hilmi bowed down and left the tent to let the count have a good night’s sleep.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

The dawn broke once more, Mount Curry waking up as it has done so for an uncountable number of years. Seeing the light, the cicadas had gone quiet and the birds had once again revealed themselves to hunt them down.

Sunlight came a bit late to the valley where the count’s men rested. The count’s men found the corpses of their slain allies upon waking up, for they were too tired and afraid to collect bodies during the night. It was quite a gruesome sight, to see so many of the dead strewn around so casually.

Some shed a tear or two for their allies; many began working on getting the corpses collected and covered with sheets as to keep this sight out of mind. Around a dozen corpses were collected in half an hour and laid side-by-side while they were identified. Those close to the dead were tasked with carrying the corpses so that they could be given a proper funeral.

Shakira, instead of her ridiculously enormous sword, now carried the body of Shakir. His corpse was slumped over her shoulders, covered by tent cloth donated to her by Sir Baha for this purpose. They didn't have much in common other than their names, but it was still a harrowing thing to carry the stiff, cold body of another human being.

A similar emotion permeated throughout the camp. Yesterday's fleeting enthusiasm to plunder was replaced with the realization that anybody could die in the following battle, and for what purpose? Most of the men were not seasoned soldiers who were ready to face such questions.

Shoulders were slumped, heads looked down, the prospect of mortality faced. Brown hadn't faced them himself, but they had been made to face something slightly worse than old John Brown's wrath.

Still, the men needed to acquire money, please their liege(s) and go to battle. They began dismantling their camp and got ready to head out for the Algernon Estate.

"Hey, you Hangvuki bastards!" One group who was not packing up was the four cultivators sent by Long Dong. They surrounded the Korean mercenaries sent by Kim Seong-min, their leader looking so furious that the space between his brows could constitute yet another valley by itself. "You shot our comrade, didn't you?!" Next to him was a fellow sect member holding a body, whose white robes had been stained by blood centered around a bullet hole.

The most fancily dressed of the mercenaries, clearly their leader, looked at the sect leader before turning back to his own men to ask a question. "*Jeo namjaga mwolaneun geojyo? Jung-gug-eoleul aneun bun-i issnayo?*" All of his comrades shrugged; these Koreans didn't know nor understand the language that the cultivator was using. However, they could still see the corpse with an excess of lead inserted via the bullet hole, so the mercenaries understood that they had committed a minor case of friendly fire during the fighting and that the man in front of them was angry because of it.

"Young master Yun, I don't think these men understand us..." Yun's disciple bowed down while humbly correcting his master.

"Then I'll make them understand." Yun slowly walked towards the mercenary captain, intending to be as threatening as possible. The captain had no time to react as the young master grabbed him by the collar and raised him up. All of the mercenaries raised their rifles in reaction. All of the barrels pointed towards Yun.

"*Mwo?!?*" The captain's legs frantically swung around as he tried to escape Yun's grasp. He had to save himself one way or another. "*Balpohada!*" So, he gave the order to fire.

At once the barrels of the M1s lit up, the bullets heading towards the young master. "Hmph. Is this what you mortals call an 'attack'?" Without letting go of the mercenary captain, Yun quickly jumped up to avoid the bullets. He met one of the incoming bullets with his feet, which he had made as hard as titanium through clever manipulation of qi, kicking the bullet like it was a football. The bullet kicked by him, violating several laws of logic and physics, was deflected towards the head of the captain. The other bullets went toward Yun's disciples, who easily dodged the projectiles.

All of the above happened in the blink of an eye. To outside observers, it looked as if the captain was shot by his own men. A few blades of grass were uprooted from the ground due to the quick movements of the young master and his disciples.

“Hmph. We’re even.” Yun kept holding on to the captain’s newly deceased body while staring daggers at the remaining mercenaries. One could feel his killing intent as if it was a tangible object. “For now. You are like frog meat compared to the fine swans that are our men, being nowhere equal.” With this he threw the dead captain as if he was a piece of garbage he had picked up from the street.

The mercenaries were shaken further, for they were already stirred from the attack yesterday, by the sudden death of their captain by what they thought to be their own hands. Their knees were weak, hands shaking like crazy, with cold sweat racing down their brows.

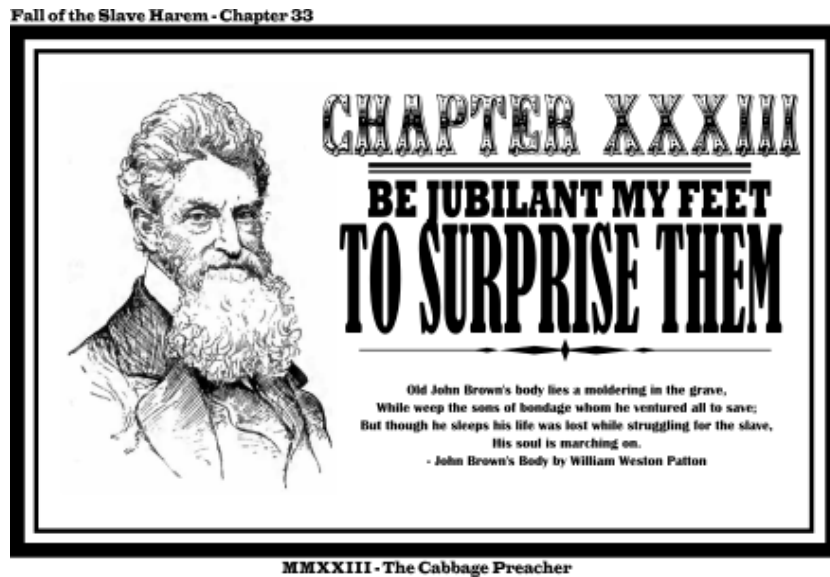
Yun and his disciples turned around, pretending nothing happened. Nobody who witnessed the scene dared speak out against the cultivators, leading the scene to become as quiet as a morgue.

Yun turned around one last time to meet the mercenaries directly eye-to-eye.

“I’d kill you all if not for the orders of Master Long Dong. Be glad that you’ll be alive to face the Demon King with us.”

Then he continued on his merry way, and so did the rest of the camp continue their way towards the Algernon Estate.

Chapter 36: Chapter XXXIII – Be jubilant my feet, to surprise them!



Mud, rain, slight fog and a steep incline, marching had become a slog that had slowed down to a petrified snail's pace. Like a snail leaving behind a trail, the count's men also left behind a trail of footprints and tired men who gave up on continuing the journey. Attrition had set in so early that the sun was still rising when tiredness set in to the hearts of men.

What was supposed to be a simple operation to capture fugitives and loot an estate had become a muddy hell on not-Earth. This would have been bearable, especially with the prospect of loot, if not for the ambush yesterday leaving a scar on their spirits. The men were constantly looking up, trying to anticipate another unexpected rain of copper and fury. They had yet to face the enemy properly, as in none of them had seen the faces of their adversary, but there was the prospect of facing them any time. That prospect, of potential death even if their allies would achieve victory over the fugitives, was quite frightening to this force of people who weren't that used to warfare against other people.

Much to their surprise however, there were no more attacks on their way to the Algernon estate. The rest of the march of the count's army turned out to be a surprisingly peaceful one, and spirits slowly recovered as they inched closer to the estate in anticipation of the loot that surely awaited them at the end.

The only one who wasn't as excited was Sir Baha, who was probably the only person in the group who wasn't presently afflicted by concerns of the material kind. He rode on his horse, flanked by his small retinue, doing his best to follow the disorganized march of the count's army. Following him was Shakira and her ridiculously enormous sword, who had just kind of stuck around after having stayed in the same tent as him.

"Can you see the estate?" Shakira looked up at Baha, who could see higher ground thanks to being mounted.

"No, but I believe that we should see it soon." Baha quickened his pace slightly, prompting his retainers to do the same. Shakira's legs protested as she had to catch up on foot. The petty lord turned to address his retainers following him from behind. "We should make haste." He wanted to

make sure that Leila's body wouldn't be looted or lost during the chaos; Baha wanted to give her a proper funeral at the least.

With their haste soon came the Algernon estate showing itself on top of yet another incline. Or, it was supposed to show itself. Baha had visited the place before so he knew where it was supposed to be, yet he couldn't see any of the estate's buildings from down where he was at. Hesitation struck him, and he quickly signaled his own men to stop. "Halt! There's something wrong going on here."

"Why'd we stop?" Shakira halted alongside. The rest of the count's men, however, didn't as they weren't beholden to the will of some petty lord. They got on top of the hill and, in a manner that wasn't too unexpected, some shrill screams were heard from the top.

Baha rushed forward on his horse without saying a word. His retainers stared at each other with a blank expression before they understood that they should probably follow their lord. Shakira, the poor soul she was without a horse, had to use her own legs to carry herself upwards. After a minute or two of arduous uphill running she saw what was wrong:

"Shit! Who built a ditch here?"

"Help get me out of this place!"

"How did you idiots not see that?"

There was a ditch built around the estate, one last surprise prepared specially for them by old John Brown, which one could easily fall into as it was obscured during the uphill climb. A few had managed to land themselves in the ditch, which had a surprise for them in the form of wooden stakes built under loosely packed dirt. Dropping down there didn't look like a pleasant experience; it wasn't a pleasant experience as those in the ditch could currently attest to.

The ditch itself might have been surprising, but it wasn't as surprising as something else that was on the hill. Or, more accurately, something that *wasn't* on the hill.

"...It's all burnt down." Sir Baha got off his high horse to take a closer look at what was left of the Algernon estate. For that matter, all that was left was blackened pieces of wood, carpentry, and perilous bits of glass. The fire had burnt so greatly that the earth under the former mansion had blackened like charcoal. There was nothing of value left, save the occasional bits of copper ore that had melted down thanks to the mansion itself acting as an expensive kiln during its final moments.

Slowly the adventurers and other men on foot made managed to climb the hill as well, and their disappointment was immeasurable. There was no loot, no slaves, nothing of value that'd make almost dying worth it.

They had only wasted their time by coming here; Count Leon had wasted his good graces and favor by making them come here to this dilapidated estate in a place so remote that even the Divine had most likely forgotten of its existence.

Worst of all, only for Sir Baha, there was no Leila to be found anywhere. Where did she lay among this field of ash and earth? Baha knew not. He frankly wasn't that excited to find out the state her corpse would be in. There somewhere laid his sister, who could have been saved if not for Count Leon having decided to rush in for the sake of surprising the fugitives. Baha bent his knees and touched the earth as well, doing his best not to cry in front of a live audience.

“Sir.” Ted, Baha’s most loyal servant, tapped on his lord’s shoulders. “You’re going to get dirt on your trousers.”

“...” Baha got up. Nobility, even the pettiest ones like him, couldn’t even have a proper emotional moment without having to care about decorum. He was instinctively about to reply with a ‘sorry’, before he also realized that lords usually didn’t apologize to their servants. Sometimes, especially when times of financial difficulty and hardship hit, Baha wished he could just quit his job.

It looked like everyone else was similarly tired after this farce, for different reasons compared Baha, and the adventurers had already began setting up camp without any orders from the count.

Count Leon himself did his best to stay back and not show his face lest he incur the wrath of the lootless adventurers. This wasn’t the time for a pompous speech. He was surprised, and frustrated, at how much his enemy had managed to damage them despite not properly facing them at all.

In all honesty, this was a dishonorable way to fight – but a man of honor against slavers Brown was not. Honor was reserved for those who were honorable in conduct to their fellow man; the wicked deserved to receive the wrath of the Lord delivered to them personally.

“...Baha! Brother!”

Baha looked around him. Was he hearing voices now? Perhaps his sister’s soul still lingered on here.

“Mistress! Is that you?” Ted had managed to locate the source of the voice. Leila’s soul was nowhere to be found; her body was still marching on, or barely marching on through the crowds of adventurers busy with setting up camp. She was flanked by her two children walking next to her and, on her arms, another one that Baha had yet to see until today.

“Sister!” Baha ran towards her, intending to hug her. He couldn’t as her hands were currently preoccupied. The petty lord had to suffice with patting the children on the head. “I thought that... I thought that those savages would definitely murder you when we came here!”

Leila was smiling, thanks to the safe reunion, but the rest of her countenance was a grim one. Her hair had become messy, her dress was laden with dust, and the kids didn’t look any better. A broken smile, one compromised of a world suddenly shattered by its sins and contradictions. “I... Their leader decided to spare me.” She didn’t look all that excited to be alive at this moment.

“Huh? *Those* savage darkskins spared you?” Baha wasn’t sure what to make of that. He still wasn’t sure that the woman in front of him was real. He had to recover from the absurdity of such a thing before he could reply further. “That’s... great!”

“It is...” said Leila, silently adding an ‘...I guess’ to the end of her sentence. She was a free woman at this point, a noble one at that, what did she realistically have to worry about? Baha couldn’t get why his sister seemed to be in such a state.

“What’s most important is that you are fine, mistress.” added Ted, ever so faithful.

“Yeah, cheer up won’t you?” further added Shakira, who had been awkwardly attending this family reunion. She had felt a tad bit too awkward when she was standing silently, hence her sudden interjection.

Leila didn't reply, but she did her best to at least not look sullen. She was a widow now, sure, but her brother had enough funds to take care of her family. Life was going to be fine. No hitches, no slave uprisings, no... None of that nonsense. The mistress would be back to her usual routine, of idle comfort and luxury, until the day she'd finally croak out of this world into another one.

This was the ideal life for a noble lady like her, for noble ladies and gents across Gemeinplatz. Raised on the shoulders of their slaves, and subjects, they could afford to stay high, mighty, and idle. That was how things were supposed to be. That's how they *must* be...

...right? The slaves, those abominable darkskins, working among themselves, that was just a fluke. Their weird rituals, of voting and consulting each other as equals, those were the workings of inferior minds. The lightskin had already found the perfect way, the most civilized way...

"Mistress? Are you fine?" Ted had already begun working on their tent with the help of Shakira. "You shouldn't stare at the sky so much. Looking at the sun is going to damage your eyes."

"Right. Thank you." Leila closed her eyes to let them rest. She was a well-read woman, but reading was just an activity to pass her idle time. The mistress didn't like to think too much. Thinking made her brain hurt, made her heart be in trouble with the harsh questions that this world presented to her, those were all things a proper lady shouldn't be worried about.

"Here, I have some tea for you, mistress." Ted had taken a break from the tent to get something for his mistress. He handed over a suitably fancy cup filled with even fancier tea.

Leila gracefully took the cup. The warm liquid flowing through her made Leila calm once more.

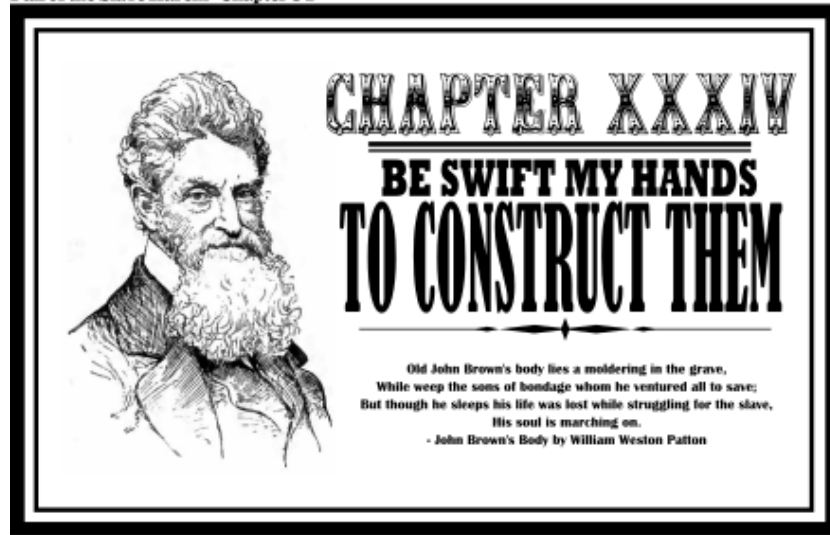
All would be fine. All was fine.

There were no wild abolitionists running around, making plans to emancipate the entirety of Gemeinplatz with righteous fury of the most hallow kind. No, totally. All was fine...

...right?

Chapter 37: Chapter XXXIV – Be swift my hands, to construct them!

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 34



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher



13th of Summer, 5859
Mount Curry, Casamonu / Azdavay

Clouds. Rain. Even more rain. A torrent of slaves. John Brown. They were all heading down, and down, slowly rolling over the mountains until they found a place to stop and rest. The clouds turned to rain, rain came down and turned into puddles, and slaves rescued themselves and turned into freemen.

Of course, the freemen weren't returning empty-handed. Brown had, in the day before the arrival of Count Leon's army, made sure that everything that wasn't bolted down would be taken back to the cave. It was odd to see so many freemen, in tatters and rags, carrying luxury furniture down to a spot below the cave; old John Brown could've switched careers, from abolitionist to shopkeeper, and opened a furniture store with all the stock that he had appropriated (some may call this action "stealing" and "a crime"; Brown would argue that the freemen were just taking back what they were owed with added interest from late payment by the late Sir Algernon).

By the end of this wild evacuation, there wasn't a soul left who wasn't tired. The plateau below the cave was filled with soft chairs, thick books, and tired freemen. Tired they were, free they also were. The air felt ever fresher, to the likes of Ekene and Ejike, whom now found themselves in a society not of masters and servants but one of equals. Where the whip cracked no further, inbred ingrates lived no longer, and one was free to loiter and prattle.

The big blue sky, even if it was mostly blocked by clouds, looked vast and nice, yet it also signaled a problem that they all soon would have: rain combined with a lack of shelter. Everything that the freemen had brought over had already been thoroughly drenched in a layer of rainwater.

"Gather around!" Brown clapped his hands to get the attention of the resting men. He added a forced cough to catch further attention. "*Ahem!*"

"What's with the commotion, old man?" Ayomide was among those who were resting, and she was now forced to get up. She was surprised by how an old man like Brown could still have such a loud voice. It was as if an occult hand had replaced his vocal cords with that of a lion.

"Young lady, cease your idleness and lend an ear, won't you?" admonished Brown "Idleness is the Devil's work and all that, I don't believe I have to make that point once more."

"Yes, you don't." This time the one replying was Shinasi. He himself had been busy carrying all the booze (and food) from the estate's cellar. "Because you make that point multiple times every day."

"Young man!" Brown bellowed in greater admonishment. "I wouldn't have to make that point if you weren't actively searching for more ways to be idle!" Everyone else seemed 'idle' to a man like John Brown. His puritanical work ethic was hard to catch up to for any sane person; the freemen definitely wouldn't be called 'idle' if you were to ask someone else other than old John Brown.

"Calm down, Mister Brown is speaking." Tubman ended their little spat with this sentence. "You're only being more idle with your arguments."

Brown nodded. "You're right, General Tubman." He took a deep breath. "There is a time and place for everything." By now everyone's attention had drifted, so Brown began with an "*Ahem!*" to get their attention once more. "We have managed to make a successful retreat from the estate, praise be to the Holy Spirit for guiding us through these turbulent times. I'd like to remind you, that we have not ended anything. No, this is only the beginning of the beginning, and we have only borrowed time until we'll eventually have to fight once more."

It was an inevitability that adventurers would soon descend upon these mountains like vultures. Bounties would be put up, rumors would spread, and every downtrodden git looking to make a quick buck would visit Mount Curry. There wasn't much difference between a monster and a fugitive.

"Which is why I propose we should be quick, quiet and efficient." Brown took hold of a chair, and raised it on to his shoulders. His old spine protested, but Brown was a protestant against this protest. "Come on now, we should get all of these off the low-ground. We'll make our refuge up in these mountains, away from prying eyes."

Seeing the old man begin working was quite effective, a whole lot more effective than his evangelism in fact. Everyone grabbed something or another, and they made their way up the cliff and into safety.

An entire day passed, the freemen busying themselves with evacuating their loot on to higher ground. Their haul was great: Sir Baha had paid his ransom with various tools as Brown had asked, and they were ready to begin construction on a level that was higher than the Stone Age.

“[Wind], [Wind], [Wind]...” Ayomide was tasked with drying wood, as there was no one else who had the ability to cast so much wind magic in a serial fashion. Her days of sitting in the corner of the slave quarter, doing her best to learn how to cast silently, came unexpectedly useful in the field of lumberjacking. “This one’s dry. Tater! You can skip stones later, come here you little brat!”

On Ayomide’s command Tater reluctantly rose up from the ground and took the dried log to the site where a house, if such a building could even be called that, was being erected under Brown’s supervision. He was no stranger to construction, and he had personally surveyed suitable land on the mountains where temporary housing could be constructed. Their population had increased by two dozen or so, meaning that the cave was no more sufficient for housing.

The “housing” itself was quite simple: A few log posts buried to the ground, with even more logs for roofing, reinforced with mud, straw and slime. Brown had noticed how quickly slimes dried up and hardened, which was why making soap from them was possible, so he used it as coating to harden the mud of the houses against the constant rain. He planned on making houses out of brick later, though they’d have to first figure out a more efficient way of firing clay than “putting clay bricks in a covered hole and lighting the hole on fire”.

For the purpose of finding better methods of firing, Baha and his former comrades from the Algernon estate’s copper kilns had gotten to tinkering on that front while the others were busy on construction. They had seen and used kilns a plenty, the problem was that the kilns over at the Algernon estate were larger ones that were constructed out of proper bricks. It wasn’t as easy to adapt such a design when all you had was mud, spit, slime, and no experience in engineering.

Construction in general was quite slow. The freemen were experienced in mining, which was, in a way, the opposite of constructing. Brown’s plans for a more conic design, similar to the ones used by the Native Americans he had observed, failed as the men didn’t have enough experience in construction to reliably construct such a shape without it falling apart. The rain didn’t help either; construction with mud in a rainy climate wasn’t among the greatest of ideas. By the end of the first day, they had managed to construct a half-finished square box.



“Woah, that looks...” Ayomide had come over to inform them that it was lunch time, but she was confronted with a building that looked like it was born as a ruin. “...quite... artistic?” She held her tongue, not wanting to break everyone’s spirits.

“We aren’t making art, young lady.” Brown didn’t look too disappointed. He turned to address the construction crew. “Don’t be dispirited. We are all flawed sinners; it’d be weird if we were constructing masterpieces on the first day. The Lord rewards those who work hard, so let us work hard and be rewarded!”

The men didn’t care much about what the Lord would reward them with, but they did agree that making anything good on the first day was impossible. It was quite odd, after their experience with Sir Algernon, to be led by someone with compassion and (despite what some might think of Brown) common sense.

“No matter what, you people are not going to be working on an empty stomach.” Ayomide was too tired to be motivated. Chanting “[Wind]” countless times had exhausted her greatly. “Come on, Hakim’s gotten something cooked up.”

Nobody was going to object to eating food, so they all went back into the cave where a common area had already been established. The cave now looked quite posh and extravagant as it housed a gold-trimmed dining table with silver cutlery, elaborately carved chairs with silk cushioning, and the finest flatbread baked by master chef Hakim. Coming back to such an environment after busying oneself with mud felt quite odd, though it was a welcome change of pace.

Ayomide jumped onto a chair, groaning in utter ecstasy when she felt herself bury into silk. “My arse has never felt this comfortable...” commented she while closing her eyes.

“Young lady! What did I tell you about such vulgarity?!” Despite Brown’s countless protests, he had been unable to curtail profanity within his camp. Especially words like ‘damn’ or ‘hell’, which meant a whole lot less to the heathens he was now living with. “Such words,” he of course refused to repeat back what Ayomide had just said “are definitely not suitable for a young woman like you to mutter.”

“You’re not my father, old man.” Ayomide gave her usual response.

“I’m thinking of adopting all of you just so you can stop using that excuse.” replied Brown sarcastically. He sat down, having done his duty as a good Christian to warn his fellow men. The construction crew followed, entering in a disorderly line into the cave.

“You’re not having dinner without me, are you?” Shinasi entered the room, having come late as he was busy watching over the periphery. He had not forgotten to bring something to drink for everyone: a small barrel of beer replaced the space in his hands that’d normally carry a shield.

Much to Shinasi’s dismay, Brown had set aside the wine for use during Communion. He had a small Christian community now, with Tubman and Kyauta, and they made sure to gather every seventh day (for there was no such thing as a “Sunday” in Gemeinplatz). Brown, now that their situation was a whole lot less dire and in need of constant daily work to scrape by, had also began observing Sabbath once more as he had regularly did back in the United States where he’d worship all day without pause.

Shinasi set down the barrel, filling a cup for himself, before slowly making his way towards the seat next to Ayomide. He hesitated for a bit, before she patted the empty seat next to him and said “Come on, you were on your legs for the entire day. Why are you so hesitant?” Shinasi took this as an invitation, so he sat down next to her. This made him come face to face with John Brown, who was too busy joining Tubman and Kyauta in prayer to the Lord to notice anything. “Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,” etc. etc.

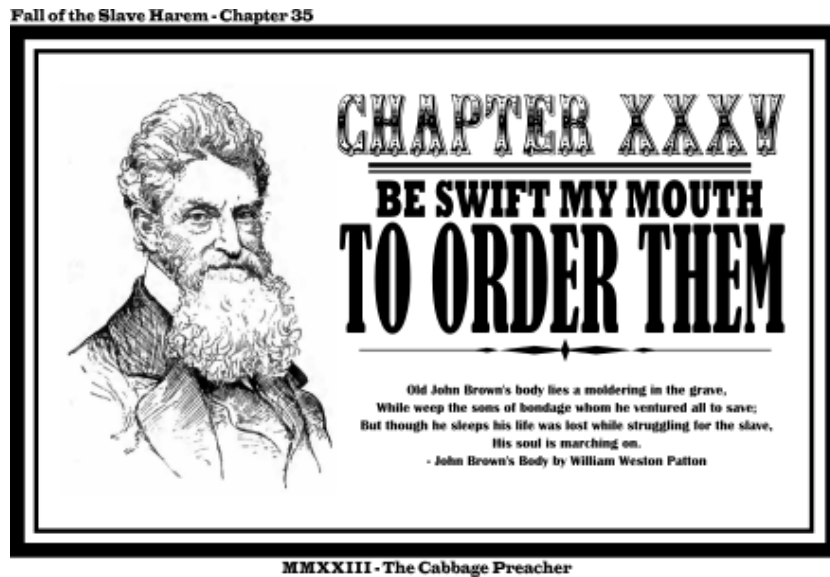
With everyone seated came Hakim and Tater, whose hands were full of flatbread and, thanks to the looted pantry of the estate, bowls filled with mashed potatoes. This was quite a plain meal, but it was quite the luxury compared to the scant gruel that they would usually receive as slaves. Spirits were quite high, and the table was filled with lively chatter.

From the despair of chains came the joys of freedom, and freedom was quite enjoyable indeed. Shinasi suddenly raised his cup and shouted. “To liberty!” He had only newly learned of this word, but he had taken quite a liking to it.

“To liberty!”

Countless clay cups clanged together in the far reaches of a mountain in Northern Gemeinplatz.

Chapter 38: Chapter XXXV – Be swift my mouth, to order them!



“...you lost men?”

“Yes sir.”

“To a bunch of barely equipped slaves?”

“Yes sir- No, actually, we lost the captain to the cultivators. So not all of us were killed by slaves.”

“Is that supposed to make me feel better?”

Kim Seong-Min really wanted to send his head crashing down to the desk from the second-hand embarrassment he felt. He sufficed by making his hand crash down on his face, damaging office equipment would only make his financial situation slightly worse, groaning loudly as he had to think about having to set aside more capital for the special anti-fugitive operation.

The mercenary in front of him looked at his boss nervously, looking to see what Kim would do. Kim didn't move a muscle, his palm firmly planted on to his face, for a whole minute while groaning and adding barely legible curses that'd make his mom throw slippers at him if she was in the room. He then calmed down, took a deep breath, and shoed the mercenary away with his hands. “Get out. I'll have something for you to do in a day or so.” Kim needed time to think.

“Yes sir!” The mercenary saluted him and left the room. Kim leaned back on his comfy office chair, he was quite a clever young man who knew not to spend money on overly expensive gamer chairs, placing his hands on the back of his head while rocking back and forth. *Maybe I should've shot that guy to make an example...* Kim shook his head at the idea that popped into his head. *No, that'd just be a waste of money. I never got why those evil guys shoot their underlings at the slightest hint of incompetence.* Kim wouldn't have gotten far in the world of business if he shot every incompetent son-of-a-donkey's-hind in his sight. Heck, shooting so many people would probably more than halve the working population of Korea and Gemeinplatz, which'd be quite bad for the economy.

Kim looked outside the window while thinking where he saw the city of Casamonu. It was quite dark outside, like any other city in Gemeinplatz during nighttime. There was no convenient electric or magic lighting, so life at the city disappeared along with the sun itself. Kim had installed a portable generator and a few electric lights into his office to not have to go to sleep along with the city. He was the sort of man who would not sleep until 3 AM, staying up to argue with strangers online.

Arguing... Thinking of his many ongoing forum quarrels, Kim remembered that he was supposed to be thinking about what to do with the fugitives on the mountains. The coalition so carefully built up by Count Leon had sort of dissolved when their first expedition resulted in failure on a comedic scale, meaning that it was every-man-for-himself when it came to eradicating the threat lurking on the mountains.

Adventurers had already rushed to Mount Curry as if it contained not copper but gold, but he was yet to hear any reports of captured slaves. This was quite disconcerting: either the slaves had already escaped, or they were managing to stay hidden in some sort of hidden base. Kim hoped for the former, he didn't really care what happened outside of his place-of-operation, but the latter meant that the slaves were planning on staying and causing panic. He had to commend them for their ability to cause indirect damage to the economy. *Perhaps I should hire some thugs of my own to damage competition in other provinces...*

Knock knock! "Who's there?" Kim's train of thought, which had slowly inched over to a plan, was derailed by a knock on his door.

Kim heard a familiar voice. "Nirmal, sir." It was his secretary.

"Come in." replied Kim, and Nirmal obliged. "What do you have to report on in the middle of the night?"

"It's about the hand cannons you brought. We have two of them spare now that their users are no longer... working with our company." Nirmal was carrying around two M1 Garands in his arms as if he was carrying a baby. The secretary was violating every known law of firearm security as he did so, which caused Kim to be slightly worried. "What should we do with them?"

"Just throw them into a stockpile in Gemeinplatz. Having them in Korea would be dangerous." Even with the might of his Isegye Company behind him, it had been quite a bother to smuggle what little arms they had brought into Korea; Kim would have begun making plans for world domination if he had the ability to bring in more weaponry. *Maybe I should move my company over to the United States*, is what he thought sometimes, but moving his portal to Gemeinplatz was impossible as far as he knew. "We might need them at some point."

"You're not going to hire new mercenaries?" Nirmal was curious as to what Kim was planning.

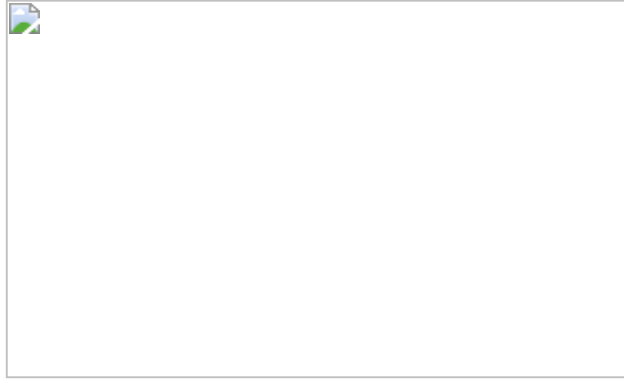
Kim shook his head. "No, I've realized something." His train of thought had reached its destination during the conversation with Nirmal.

"What'd that be, sir?"

Rising up from his seat, Kim had only one thing to declare: "Sometimes you have to do things yourself."

20th of Summer, 5859
Mount Curry, Casamonu / Azdavay

“Praise be to the Our Father in Heaven, it looks beautiful...”



Brown stood alongside a small group of freemen, and in front of them stood semi-spherical structures that one might mistake for some sort of housing if they were to squint their eyes. Their hands and clothes, or what little clothes they had, were covered in mud and grime similar to the houses they were standing in front of.

Straws bunched together, bent and covered in a mix of mud and slime with a wood log in the middle to balance everything out, were the pinnacle of construction technology in Mount Curry. It had taken the construction crew a long week of scaling down ambitions and experimentation to finally arrive at a design which they could construct with their limited skills and resources. Making a structure out of mud wasn't easy; making a structure out of mud which didn't slowly melt and disappear in the rain was hard.

Brown eventually planned constructing houses with wood and clay bricks, with all the saws and whatnot they had acquired courtesy of Sir Baha, but that required even more time and skill. What was important right now was to stop having to cram everyone in the cave like they were sardines in a can. These glorified mud tents would have to do for now.

Besides, even these mud tents were somehow better than their old slave accommodations.

“As beautiful as mud can be, anyways.” added Ayomide, who had been tasked as always with drying any material that needed to be dried. Her hands were sore from having to move them around so much while drying.

“You see young lady,” began Brown which prompted Ayomide to get ready for another lecture “I think it is most beautiful that one can make shelter just from the earth which our Maker has provided us so graciously in abundance.”

Yes, oh so gracious is he that we are made to live under mud and rain, added Ayomide silently. She had learned, along with everyone else, to not enter fruitless arguments with John Brown. They had learned that one couldn't change Brown's mind about “God” and whatnot.

“Speaking of earth and mud, I wonder what the Bilal and his kilnsters are doing.” Ayomide expertly changed the subject, and Brown followed suit as to not be idle.

“We should check, young lady.” Brown and Ayomide bid farewell to the construction crew as they headed down to where Bilal was conducting experiments to make a kiln that actually worked.



“May the Divine bless us with a working pottery kiln. If willing we shall get a furnace that burns bright and properly processes poetry...” Vaiz was praying for divine intervention while Bilal and his men were contributing by praying and keeping watch over the fire. His hands open in prayer were covered in mud; the priest clearly hadn’t sat by idly to which Brown would reply with something akin to “faith is dead without good works”.

“Cap’, the smoke isn’t going black!” shouted Hakim, who was tasked with keeping watch over the fire. Cooking and pottery weren’t all too dissimilar, especially in the department of fire making.

“Good. Let’s hope that it stays that way. Keep fanning that fire!” replied Bilal, who was commanding everyone else in the area. Black smoke meant that combustion was not complete, which meant that not enough oxygen was entering the kiln which’d hamper efficiency. No one in the area knew what an “oxygen” was, except for Brown and Tubman who themselves weren’t too knowledgeable on the subject. They knew or quickly learned that fire needed an intake of air to burn, the hard part was trying to construct a kiln that could get enough air in while not letting heat out.

With the knowledge above, Bilal and his team had slowly iterated towards a workable convection kiln design.



It was a laughably simple and small design compared to what they had back in the mines, but it was a pretty impressive one considering the process leading up to it: plenty of kilns were shattered, countless pottery botched, and one man had even almost lost their hand when they accidentally touched a heated kiln. At the bottom was the “firebox”, where the fuel (mostly twigs and straw: Bilal had observed that directly putting logs in would cause the pottery to crack from the intense heat) would be placed through a hole opened to the side to allow air to pass through. Atop the firebox sat the chamber where the pottery itself would sit atop a column separating it from directly meeting the fire.

The construction itself was simple, but the hardest part was the material from which the kiln was constructed from. The area of Mount Curry which found themselves in had soil with lots of clay, which tended to crack by itself when it was used to make such a large structure. After trying different materials to strengthen the clay, the kiln crew found that adding high amounts of sand could help the kiln survive.

“Hakim, how’s the pottery faring?” asked Bilal. He was happy to see that their kiln had successfully survived its maiden voyage. Now came for the real test: successfully firing pottery.

“Cap’ it’s...” Hakim took hold of a vase sitting inside the kiln, using a sword to grab it by a handle and drag it towards him. Out came a perfectly intact piece of pottery, much to the jubilee of everyone in the area. “Oh! It’s... a vase!”

“Praise be!” exclaimed Vaiz as he moved his hands near the vase, not touching it as it was still hot as Hell, as if he was blessing it. “Thank ye for rewarding our hard work, o’ great one!”

“Thank the Lord, the King of Kings, and the Holy Spirit who leads us!” Brown joined in the festivities with a blessing of His own. “Oh, what a great day this is!”

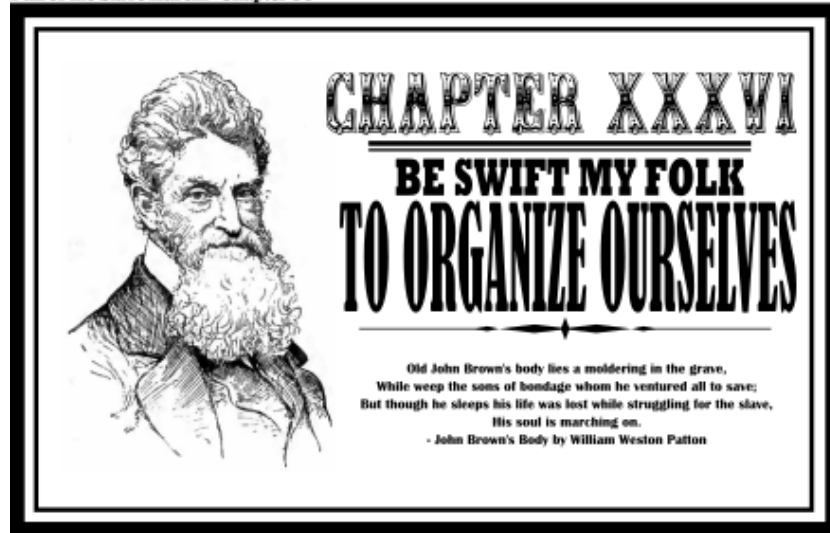
Ayomide silently watched as a gang of fully-grown adult men gathered around a piece of pottery and prayed around it with great jubilee.

Today, on the 20th of Summer, 5859, Bilal and his crew entered the New Stone Age (a.k.a. the Neolithic Age).

Shoutouts to [Ancient Pottery](#) for [this great guide](#) which helped me greatly during this episode. Sorry if I went a bit overboard with the technical details in this episode - I do love engineering and whatnot, so I couldn't help but prattle on about kilns.

Chapter 39: Chapter XXXVI – Be swift my folk, to organize ourselves!

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 36



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

23rd of Summer, 5859
Mount Curry, Casamonu / Azdavay

Civilization, the human kind that we know of, has an interesting property in that its growth is exponential. If one were to jump one millennium from 50,000 BC to 49,000 BC, one would see the same scenery: humans barely figuring out how to light a fire. But if one were to jump the same distance from 1000 AD to 2000 AD, one would switch from gallant knights on horseback to gallant thermonuclear warheads on nuclear submarines.

Of course, Brown wasn't going to be making such a huge leap; constructing nuclear weaponry to rain righteous hellfire on slavers was unfortunately quite hard due to the fact that Brown didn't even know what a "radiation" was. Not to mention that there's a limit to exponentiality when all one has is a bunch of miners turned kiln workers. Nonetheless...



“Praise be to the Lord!”

“The Greatest hath delivered us with liquid of the earth!”

Brown, and his small congregation next to the larger congregation of Vaiz, were quite excited as progress itself in liquid form melted down to a mold of clay. From their newly found cradle in the Neolithic, the people of Mount Curry had launched themselves into...

“Copper! Sweet copper, O’ Lord!”

...as announced by Harriet Tubman herself, they had launched themselves into the Chalcolithic Age (a.k.a. the Copper Age) in record pace (3 days, compared to the thousands of years needed by the average human society on Earth).

Such progress may not seem grand to those reading this on their magical computation devices. To a bunch of abolitionists looking for any sort of advantage, the manufacture of copper was quite a big deal.

Unlike the stone which Brown and Ayomide had fashioned spears out of, copper was a metal which was much more versatile. One couldn’t for example, unless one was especially brave or foolish, fashion a bowl out of stone; one could fashion all sorts of bowls out of copper. Helmets, random bits of fashionable plate that the adventurers might call armor, nails etc. all opened up thanks to the wondrously malleable metal that was copper.

“That’s quite a good spear tip if I do say so myself.” Bilal raised the clay mold with the molten copper poured into it as the onlookers watched with pride. Ayomide was at the back, wondering whether Mount Curry was slowly driving the faithful folk to insanity, for she couldn’t find any reasonable explanation for so much zealotry over copper of all things. Sure, she was happy that she wouldn’t have to eat off of wet, muddy bowls, but did *that* really call for such ceremony?

After having sufficiently stared at their comrade’s success, the crowd around the kilns dispersed once more to busy themselves with work, work currently entailing constructing half-spheres out of mud and foraging / hunting food. Not quite the most glorious or exciting of tasks, but one had to do what one had to do in order to survive in Mount Curry.

Returning from his tasks to take a break was Shinasi, who had been overlooking the path that led up to the fugitive settlement. Of course, the freemen had made sure that they weren’t visible from the path itself. Their settlement was built up the cliff, the same one that lead up to the cave that had sheltered Brown, behind higher sections of mountain. Even the smoke from the burning kilns was quite hard to spot from the path.

“Oh, it’s Mister Shinasi.” commented one little Tater, stating the obvious upon observing the former adventurer approaching. “Any trouble on that path?”

“I’d be screaming my lungs out if there was.” replied Shinasi, who clearly wasn’t screaming out anything. “Seen seven adventurers on the path today, though they of course didn’t intend to scale the cliff.” He slowly and lazily yawned. It was quite boring being idle. “I’ll be hitting the hay now; it’s been a long day of doing nothing.”

“G’night then.” Tater waved, before a sinister smile appeared on his face. “Good luck with your miss.”

“Shut up, kid.” said Shinasi, dismissing Tater by quickly walking away from the boy towards his newly built dwelling. He hadn’t figured out which was worse: the lodgings at the Adventurer’s Guild or the lodgings over at the Brown Mud Guild? Looking over the mud house that he was standing in front of, Shinasi couldn’t help but compare and evaluate his situation.

Doubt tended to beset him, as it always does to those who dare take a step forward. He was a fugitive now, no better than a fugitive slave except for the color of his skin. He had most likely slain people, actual living people like him, in the ambush. There was still a chance for him to turn back, return to normal adventuring and forget about all of this abolitionist nonsense. Sure, he had gained somewhat of an ideological basis for being against nobility and slavery, nor did he see the darkskins and demi-humans as inferior or deserving of slavery. Joining an abolitionist cause however, it felt like a lost cause to fight against an entire empire, especially when his own liberty wasn’t the liberty at stake.

Shinasi violently shook his head, as if his own thoughts were flies that were buzzing around his head that he wanted to scare away. *I should really go to sleep.* He approached the mud house, only to be interrupted by someone else coming out of the door.

“Oh, you’re back.” It was Ayomide, with hands ever so muddy.

Shinasi didn’t know what to say for a second, his brain was too full with needless thought. He eventually recovered enough to greet Ayomide back, and point out the elephant in the mud house. “My job’s done for the day. Also, why are you in my house?”

“My own hands were involved in building this one, so I think I have some sort of right to be in here.” replied Ayomide casually. “Besides, I’m a free woman, aren’t I? I can do whatever I want.”

Shinasi sighed. “I know that, but freedom doesn’t exactly entail being free to break the law.”

Upon hearing this reasonably reasonable point, Ayomide sufficed by shrugging. “What law? We don’t have any laws here, unless you want to listen to Brown and Vaiz preach about ‘laws of the Lord’ and whatnot.”

“Huh?” Shinasi paused to think. They didn’t have any laws, not in Mount Curry at the least, now that he thought about it. “Maybe I should ask the old man to begin prosecuting criminals who break and enter. Ahem,” He realized only now that he had been sent off track “legality besides, what were you doing in my house?”

“I was just checking to see if the house was struc... What was that word? Struc-... struk-chu-a-lee safe.” Ayomide took a peek back at the house with a hint of pride. “The walls were filled to the brim with water. You’d be drowning in your sleep if I didn’t dry its insides.”

“Thank you, for not letting me drown.” Shinasi wished that he had the convenient abilities of a magic hairdryer. He wanted to give a compliment to Ayomide, but he couldn’t find one that wasn’t banal, ingenuine, or embarrassing to say out loud (most of them were in the third category). In the end Shinasi went with something simple that might not even be classified as a compliment. “Must be tiring to go through each and every one of these.”

“It’s fine. I only inspected yours, our guard needs to have a good sleep after all.” Ayomide smiled ever so slightly. “Can’t have stray adventurers coming up to catch fugitives now, can we?”

Shinasi replied by nervously laughing at the jab. “Yeah, having none of that would be nice, wouldn’t it?”

Ayomide couldn’t help but pause at the thought. “No adventurers to hunt us down. What a world that’d be.” She paused when she heard Brown calling out to a group of people. “Oh, I think it’s time for the council again.” The revolutionary catgirl took a few steps towards the cave, only to stop once she noticed that Shinasi wasn’t following her. “Aren’t you going to join?”

“No,” Shinasi yawned more to make his point. “I really need to go to sleep. Don’t have much to speak about there anyways; all this politics is way above my head. I’ll be going along with whatever it is that Mount Curry decides.”

“I see.” Ayomide approached Shinasi to give him a pat on the back and another smile, albeit this one was a bit bigger. There was an awkward moment of silence while Ayomide thought of what to say. “Good... night to you.” Her hand was still on Shinasi’s back, the awkward moment drawing longer and even more awkward by every second. Eventually Ayomide settled on not speaking too much, separating from Shinasi with a silent wave of the hand.

“Good night to you too.” replied Shinasi, meekly raising hands to wave. He had been paralyzed in the moment due to one obvious reason. *She stood way too close; I could even hear her breathe!* The awkward young man he was, Shinasi cursed himself for not having said something like “Do you have anything else to say?” or “So, do you like being this close to me?”. *Damn this cattish woman and damn the coward whose interest lies in her!*

It seemed that Ayomide was skilled in casting spells of the mundane variety, at least on Shinasi. Or, all the more likely, Shinasi's magic resistance was too low (which was quite the problem for a tank like him).

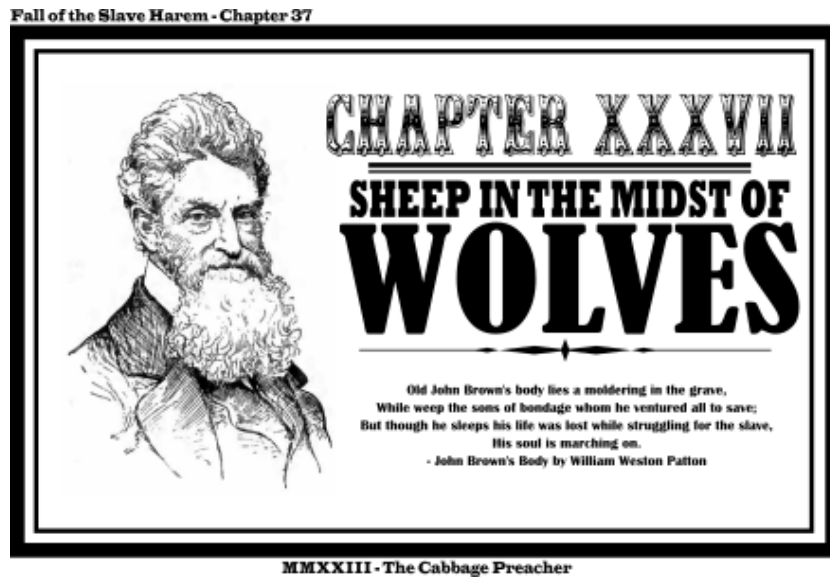
I should really go to sleep. Sleep makes everything better. Having figured out the secret for happiness, sleep, Shinasi entered the mud hut to find another surprise: On the floor was not straw, the current standard of bedding in Mount Curry and in most of Gemeinplatz, but a bear pelt laid on top of straw, which was quite the luxury. *Thinking about it, I haven't seen any man-bears in a while; we should've spotted plenty in Mount Curry. Their fur could be quite useful if we could.*

His thoughts on the man-bear ecosystem aside, Shinasi wasn't unhappy to receive some extra bedding. What had gotten him, as Brown would say with his fancy and big words, discombobulated was who this pelt might belong to: Ayomide had been wearing the waistcoat-and-pants combination since summer had arrived with a striking lack of bear pelt. He turned to the door, intending to ask Ayomide whether sleeping on her clothes was okay, before he realized that the one who left this little (or large, considering how bear pelts usually are) gift was Ayomide herself. One usually didn't have to ask the giver of a present whether it was okay to use said present.

No use thinking much about it now. Shinasi was too tired to be flustered; he was tired enough to fall like freshly cut timber face-first on to the bed. *Huh, what's this smell? It's kind of familiar.* He didn't have to think much to realize that he had heard the same pleasant smell a moment ago when Ayomide had been so close to her. It felt like she was right next to him.

...damn this cattish woman and damn the coward whose interest lies in her! Once more Shinasi thought the same thing. He eventually drifted into another world, to the land of dreams which awaits all those who heed the call of sleep. Tonight's sleep was, compared some of the more luxury accommodations Shinasi had acquired during times of financial luck, the most pleasant that had experienced.

Chapter 40: Chapter XXXVII – Sheep in the midst of wolves.



Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.

- Matthew 10:16

Like they had done so many a time before, the freemen of Mount Curry had gathered. Not to throw a party or anything of that sort, there wasn't enough of anything to throw even the lamest of parties. Cramped together in and outside the cave, some sitting on the looted couches while others preferred not to seat themselves as the silken cushions were unbearably comfortable for them. Small chitter and little chatter travelled around the room while the freemen concentrated around the area, forming a dangerously high concentration of volatile liberty which was ready to spontaneously combust and engulf every oppressor in its radius.

The crowd itself had gathered into a donut-shaped circle, this donut definitely not being edible unless one was a cannibal. In the middle was no one, on the periphery was everyone discussing with each other about what they wanted to talk about. This wasn't exactly a planned style of discussion, far from anything you might see in professional debate and closer to something you might see on (insert contemporary social media site here to make fun of). One part of the donut got louder, another got quieter, a far-off piece was busy playing hopscotch... It was pure chaos distilled into a tasty donut shape.

...*Why am I thinking so much about donuts?* Ayomide's train of thought was derailed by a craving for doughy circles covered in criminally copious amounts of sugar. She had first seen them in Jacob's maid café; Ayomide had of course never gotten a chance to taste one despite her attempts to break out at night and raid the kitchen. The revolutionary catgirl wizard made a mental note to try a donut if she ever got a chance to. Perhaps Hakim could bake something like that? Ayomide didn't know how sugar was produced, and whether it was even possible to produce it here in Mount Curry. Was sugar a plant product? A kind of rock, akin to salt? The product of an animal? She truly didn't know, and her ignorance infuriated her. Perhaps Brown knew where sugar came from; if he had sugar back in Awmereighka was another thing that was unclear to Ayomide.

“Ye who art in this council, ladies and gentlemen,” boomed out the voice of Brown. The freemen felt sort of awkward due to being referred to ‘ladies and gentlemen’ considering that they were considered the lowest rung of society. “If you have discussed your own matters enough, then with the Lord as our witness I’d like it if we could begin discussing our own matters.”

“Captain Brown.” One certain Bilal came onto the scene after announcing his presence. He marched in the middle of the crowd-made donut to address everyone in the scene. “I don’t think I need to report on how we’re doing in the kilns.”

“Yes, it’s impossible not to hear you all pray over pottery.” replied Ayomide from the crowd, which prompted a few laughs except for Brown, Tubman and Vaiz who weren’t pleased with the heathen’s comment.

“Ahem, just as our most esteemed Lady Orange reported.” replied Bilal, who wasn’t pleased either. “We’ve sorted the kilns out. However, as we found out during our work, we have something else that needs sorting out.” He pointed towards his own body, which was naked except for his baggy pants that were barely holding together. This sort of attire was repeated among the freemen who weren’t exactly able to follow the latest trends in fashion.

“Clothes?” shouted one member of the audience, and Bilal nodded in response. “Of course, it’s clothes! We can barely get by during the summer, with everyone of us being in the cold highlands, not to even think of the dreadful winter that’ll eventually come.”

“Indeed, winter does tend to come after summer.” stated Brown, whose statement was as obvious as cabbages being green. He had meant it as a sort of allegorical statement, about how they should not be feeling easy after their victorious escape, but this allegory ended up flying over everyone so highly that it might as well have ended up crashing into another planet.

“... Y-yes, the seasons do tend to do that, captain.” Bilal paused for a moment after having confirmed Brown, unsure of how to continue his speech after such a sentence.

“If it is clothes that you look for,” Ayomide came to the rescue of Bilal. “We’ve just conveniently acquired funds thanks to our generous patrons.”

Bilal’s reply to this proposition was quick. “Then let’s go to the nearest town. Surely, they’ll be understanding when a bunch of darkskins go shopping for clothes. Nor will they be looking out for fugitives after a mine full of slaves took flight.”

“White folk to tend to have their eyes peeled wide open after they hear of fugitives.” commented Tubman, standing among the audience, drawing from her experience as an operator in the Underground Railroad. “You don’t want to be seen wandering by yourself.”

“The most important part is ‘not be seen wandering by yourself’, as I think General Tubman can attest.” Brown had already been scheming a few things, and Bilal had brought the perfect opportunity for him to bring them up.

“You’re right, Captain Brown.” Tubman could see where he was going. “A good ally, a good excuse and a good attitude can let you reach forbidden lands. Be wise as a serpent, and you can even walk as a sheep in the midst of wolves.”

Brown couldn’t keep himself from seizing this opportunity to quote the Bible. “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.’.

That's an excellent quote from the Good Book, one that I believe is imperative to keep in mind."

The old man, famous for being harmless as a dove, added Ayomide silently.

"I'll be getting a team together to sort the clothes problem out, along with anything else you may need our funds to be used on." concluded Brown. "Get together a shopping list, a list of items to buy, and we'll figure something out." He had added the definition of a 'shopping list' just in case the locals hadn't developed the concept of one, not aware of the fact that shopping lists were about as old as history itself.

With his complaint having been heard, Bilal blended back into the crowd. Next up was Tubman, who was the only otherworlder, other than Brown, that the freemen liked. "I've also noticed that something has been missing." The freemen waited for her to point toward something like Bilal, but she didn't point to anything. "This group and this place, I don't think we have a name for them."

The freemen looked at each other, trying to remember if they had an official name for themselves. The discussion went on for a minute, before consensus was reached: No, the freemen in Mount Curry didn't have a name for themselves.

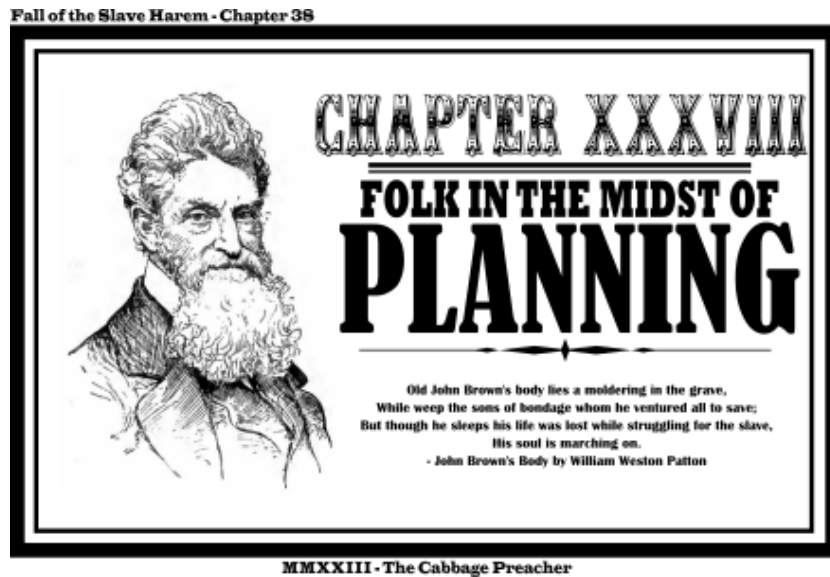
"Is it *that* important, old lady?" Ayomide looked relaxed and quite unbothered. "I don't think having a name for our little organization is important."

"There's no harm in choosing one." replied Bilal. "Hmm..." Nothing popped into his mind. Nobody really had any experiences with abolitionist groups, meaning that they also didn't have any idea on naming schemes.

"How about... naming this place, uhm, Liberty Cave? Libertycave? Something like that." said Ayomide, giving the first thing to pop into her mind.

"No, that honestly sounds lame. How about..." Discussion suddenly lit up amongst the crowd, sending waves of name suggestions around the donut. This question, which Tubman would think to be quite trivial, ate up the rest of the day even as the freemen separated from each other for the night.

Chapter 41: Chapter XXXVIII – Folk in the midst of planning.



24rd of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Trees. They're quite the common sight, unless you're in the Arctic. Or the desert. Or the tundra. Or in the middle of the ocean. Or in a city. Thinking about it, trees aren't a common sight at all for a lot of people. Thankfully, Gemeinplatz in its northern parts were chock full of trees that even the American pioneers couldn't even begin considering cutting it all down. For miles the ocean of green stretched, ready to be prime fuel in case some dolt decided to start a forest fire.

Up far away from the forest, where the trees got coniferous and the lands treacherous, sat the men of the now-reformed League of Gileadites. Most of them hadn't actually known anything about Gilead until Brown told them the story of the brave Israelites, not on an exodus but *the* Exodus, who gathered to face their foe on the mountain – such a story was relatable to those who were currently stuck doing the same thing. Pharaoh or emperor, it mattered not when their enemy was the same enemy that has befallen man since the beginning of civilization: tyranny and barbarity. Some had even begun referring to the “emperor” as a “pharaoh” as an insult which, while probably not a crime punishable by death since not many in Gemeinplatz knew what a pharaoh was, would still bring quite the shock to the average citizen of the Gemeinplatz Empire to see the highest office in the land being so openly and wantonly insulted.

However, there was someone who hadn't become a member of the League yet. Someone who had been asleep during the discussion.

“Shinasi! Wake up, you sack of potatoes!” Ayomide came into the room, banging a pot and a pan to create noise that sounded like Satan's own brand of music.

“Mmh... Argh...” The noises coming out of Shinasi were not ones that showed contentment with being waken up in such a vocal manner. He swore to beat up whoever was making all that noise into a pulp, before he opened his eyes and found that the one making such cacophony was Ayomide. “Eh? What's happening?”

“Good morning.” Ayomide finally dropped the pan and pot, and silence reigned over Libertycave once more.

“Good... morning? What’s the noise?” Shinasi looked around him, eyes still half-closed, to find that there didn’t seem to be any trouble going on.

“We’re going on an expedition to Casamonu, and Brown needs your help.” She pointed to a small group outside, a group that included Brown.

“Huh? What’s with the sudden expedition?” Shinasi was calmer now. Travelling somewhere else instead of standing at the same spot everyday seemed better to him. Plus, knowing that they were not in danger probably helped.

“Yesterday, when you were asleep...” Ayomide quickly related the events of yesterday to Shinasi “...and Brown has gathered together a few people to go on a shopping spree. Come on, get up.” She extended her hand towards Shinasi, whose body was still tucked under the bear fur.

Shinasi extended his hand, not expecting much from a catgirl who was so short and stout. He was surprised when she managed to pull him to his feet in one pull. “How the...”

Ayomide tilted her head. “Hm? Why’re you surprised?”

“I wasn’t expecting you to be this strong.” Shinasi let go of her hand as it felt a bit awkward.

“I run around, carry logs, do magic...” Ayomide rolled up her sleeve to flex her muscles, which weren’t much thanks to a lack of protein in Mount Curry. Her arm contained more flab than muscle. “I’m not like those lightskin ladies who look as if they’re walking twigs.”

“I guess teapots are better than twi-” Shinasi shut himself up after having made an insensitive comment, and he closed his eyes while expecting retribution. He was surprised to hear a hearty chuckle from Ayomide.

“Right? It’d be *quite* bad if I, let’s say, snapped in half.” Ayomide added a sarcastic shrug to her own comment. “Then what’d you do without an easy bounty to snatch?”

“I don’t know, it’d be quite the hard time for poor old me.” replied Shinasi. He added a fake sigh of worry for comedic effect. Suddenly he heard Brown calling out for him, thought the old man was far too away for his voice to sound coherent.

Ayomide looked towards the general direction of Brown. “Come on, let’s not keep the old man waiting.” She took a step towards Brown’s direction while beckoning for Shinasi to come alongside her. “Otherwise, he’ll be giving us a lengthy lecture on being punctual and whatnot.”

Shinasi found Ayomide’s point to be quite poignant, so he followed her without further question. He passed by the camp, which had quite vibrant thanks to the addition of the mud huts. Now that people were not huddling around the cave doing their best not to freeze their posteriors, they were much more energetic and hopeful about their situation. A few fires, carefully kept weak as to not be too noticeable from afar, lit up while the people of Libertycave prepared their breakfast.

Shinasi could hear his stomach growl; he had been unceremoniously dragged into a meeting without a chance to get anything. He was thinking of getting something himself when Ayomide suddenly paused. After a minute of talking to someone tending to a fire, she got a piece of shepherd

reed bread. “Catch.” The small piece gently flew towards Shinasi. He managed to nick it in time, though such a slow throw from such a small distance wasn’t the hardest to catch in the first place.

Shinasi blankly stared at the bread for a second, before he realized that it was meant for him. “Ah? Thank you.” He quickly chewed down what small amount there was in his hand. It was enough to stop him feeling hungry at the least.

With his hunger satiated, the duo then quickly marched on to meet the old man. He had made himself a makeshift war room from the remains of the mansion: a fine mahogany chair inlaid with gold and silver held up a map of the local area also looted from the mansion. There were no chairs around, for Brown found it impossible to sit around while planning and speaking. He also found it impossible to sit while praying, but that was beside the point at the present moment. *The old man is awfully mobile for someone so, well, old*, thought Ayomide upon seeing him make rounds around the table.

“Young man! Where have you been?” Brown seemed to not be too angry, though thinking about it Shinasi realized that he hadn’t seen Brown be genuinely angry before. He was oft disappointed, yes, but he wasn’t wont to anger. “The sun has been up for a good hour or two now. One should wake up before the sun does.”

“Sorry old man.” Having sufficiently excused himself, Shinasi intended to quickly drift to the main topic at hand. “So, did you need my help?” He took a look at the map on the table. “I can’t read the map, or anything for that matter, if that’s what you need help with.”

“You can’t read?” Shinasi was surprised to see that the one protesting his statement of illiteracy was Ayomide. “I thought that adventurers were supposed to be literate. What, with all the quest-reading and whatnot you have to do.”

Shinasi was taken aback by Ayomide’s disappointment. “Yeah, adventurers do tend to be literate.” He felt like an uneducated oaf now, which was definitely not a feeling of the pleasant kind. “But all the reading work was done by my group’s leader, Shakir, so I never got to learn all the letters.”

Brown suddenly interrupted Shinasi. “Ahem. If you’d let me speak, please.” Now he looked to be slightly annoyed after having been ignored. “I didn’t call you here for purposes of literacy. I have need of you in other departments, mainly navigation and information.” He pointed at the map that still sat on the desk. “The map only contains the locations of places and their names. I can’t exactly know what lies around those parts, and I assumed that you might have made your way towards Casamonu at some point in your life.” He extended his gaze towards Ayomide. “Perhaps he might help me if he isn’t preoccupied with you?” Ayomide met Brown’s gaze, one of fatherly admonishment refined through having had twenty children.

“I’d be happy to help.” Shinasi stepped forward to ease the situation. “I was actually born in Casamonu, so I’ve travelled back to the city plenty of times to meet up with family.” He took a quick look at the map, realizing the odd situation they were in. “Of course, I haven’t had to travel there from the mountain before.” The former adventurer then took a closer look, trying to orient himself with the place he was in. He couldn’t read the labels, but what was a mountain and what wasn’t a mountain was pretty obvious when looking at the map. After asking Brown to read aloud the names of a few local settlements, Shinasi managed to connect the locations he had visited before with the locations on the map. He then drew attention to a thick line that ran towards Curry, before shying away from the mountain itself and curving towards Casamonu. “This is the main

road, the one that connects Casamonu and Zon'guldac. We should head for there if we want safe travel."

Ayomide didn't look too pleased with the proposition. "Umm... You mean that there are a lot of people on the road?" She paused for a moment, hoping that someone would notice the obvious flaw in such an idea. Nobody seemed to, so she continued "I don't think having a bunch of fugitives travel on the main road is a safe idea. Unless..." her eyes shifted between Brown and Shinasi "... you two want to go alone? Can you really carry enough supplies for everyone here amongst the two of you?"

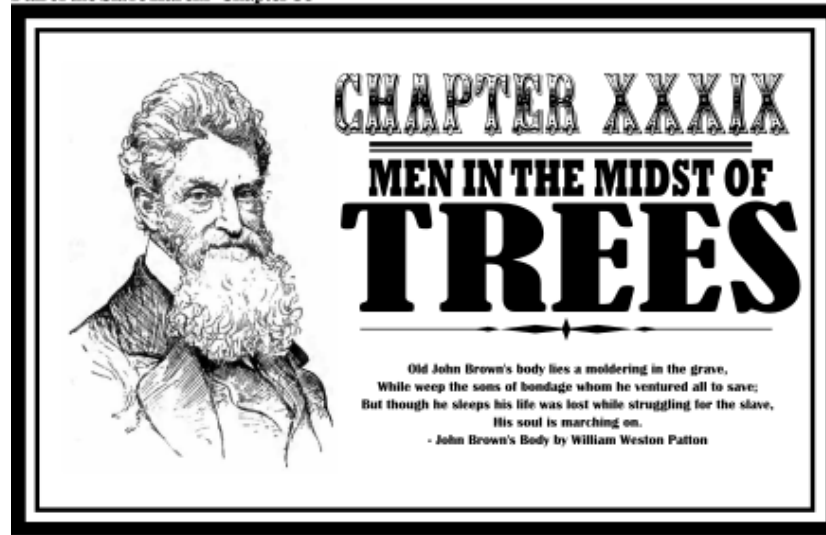
Shinasi closed his eyes to think. Brown didn't, opting to reply instead. "Young lady, you don't need to travel as fugitives."

This reply only served to confuse Ayomide more. "I don't think we can change our status, old man."

Brown had another idea. "Well..." He smiled upon realizing a chance to insert a bit of impromptu Bible study "This is the part where we have to be wise as serpents, and slip in."

Chapter 42: Chapter XXXIX – Men in the midst of trees.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 39



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

27th of Summer, 5859

Outskirts of Mount Curry, Casamonu

Trees. They're quite the common sight, unless you're in Hell. Or Heaven. Or a metropolis. Or space. Or in a black hole. Thinking about it, trees aren't a common sight at all for a lot of people. Thankfully, Gemeinplatz in its northern parts were chock full of trees that mass deforestation would be impossible without an Industrial Revolution of sorts. For miles the ocean of green stretched and... Hey, haven't we done this sort of intro to a chapter before?

In the midst of the countless trees lay a small party lead by one certain individual named John Brown, radical abolitionist, novice soap maker and non-conspicuous old man. "We've all memorized our lines, right?"

"Yes, old man." Flanking old Brown was Ayomide, radical catgirl abolitionist, former maid café worker and present log drying expert. "I have those lines drilled so deep into me that I'm afraid I'll never be able to pluck them out."

"I bet I'll be reciting these when I'm drunk." Flanking the flanking Ayomide was young Shinasi, former winesop / oenophile adventurer turned not-so-radical abolitionist human tank. "At least it'd be better than me letting the beans spill when my mouth gets loose."

This odd trio was travelling in single file through a small desire path that cut a clear line through the forest from Mount Curry. Clearly this path hadn't been used much in recent times: errant stones and plants had worked tirelessly to make traversing the path harder than it should be. They all had to move in sync as any of them stopping made the person behind them stop completely, like what Brown decided to do at the moment Shinasi talked about being drunk. He stopped, looking at the young man directly. "Young man, we have no room in the budget for any drinks. You need not worry about spilling any beans *without* volition." Brown made sure to especially stress the part about volition. "Let's just say that I have some experience with those who spill beans with volition." A certain Hugh Forbes, Brown would definitely curse his name if cursing others wasn't a sin, came to his mind when uttering these words.

Shinasi had to stop as Brown stopped, which made him felt a bit stressed out when he was stuck so close between an old man and a catgirl. “Of course, captain, I’m an adventurer of my word who follows the adventurer’s code closely: don’t kill steal, have loot sharing enabled, and make sure you don’t accidentally use public chat instead of party chat.”

Brown looked at Shinasi as if the young man had spoken in Proto-Sino-Tibetan to him. “Have loot sharing enabled? May I ask what that exactly means?” He began walking once more, allowing Shinasi to walk and talk.

Shinasi fell silent for a second, not out of fear but out of needing to think after such an odd question of language. “Huh...” It wasn’t everyday that he had to explain adventurer lingo to a man who was completely otherworldly in understanding.

Ayomide decided to butt in as well. “Oh, I’m very curious as well.” She hadn’t exactly understood much in the oddly worded adventurer’s code either. Sure, Ayomide had heard adventurer lingo in the maid café before, but she was definitely unable to understand what they meant in any usable context.

The young adventurer found more motivation to exposit now that he had an opportunity to impress his catgirl comrade with his big load of knowledge. “You see, these were terms brought over by the first otherworlders. Apparently, back on *Örf*, many otherworlders would engage in an activity known as an ‘*ememoharpiji*’.” He sounded surprisingly intellectual when expositing needless information.

Brown did his best to spell out the ungodly word that Shinasi had uttered. “*M-M-O-R-P-G?*” He managed to land close enough with his Yankee understanding of phonology. “What might that mean?”

Shinasi was quick in satiating Brown’s curiosity. “It apparently meant something like ‘massively multi-player on-line role-playing game’ in a language spoken on *Örf*.”

“Massively multiplayer online roleplaying game?” Brown quickly translated this monster of a word into English so that he could break it down in a much easier way. “That in English would be... *massively multi-player on-line roleplaying game*.” A spark lit up in Brown’s old brain. “The abbreviation of that would be *M.M.O.R.P.G.*, which sounds awfully similar to how that word is spelled in your language.” Having completed his dive into linguistics, John Brown came to the obvious conclusion. “I think that those otherworlders and I might have spoken the same language.”

“You don’t say!” The young adventurer clearly didn’t seem to be too shocked by this revelation as Brown was. “Many otherworlders come from Awmereighka, so I wouldn’t be surprised if the old otherworlders were Awmereighkan as well. That being said...” Shinasi’s eyes seemed to gleam more with curiosity now. “I’m guessing you participated in *ememoharpiji* as well? I want to hear how it was from a genuine otherworlder!” Grand clans and guilds, massive dungeon raids, thousands of participants... Shinasi had always heard rumors about how massive an *ememoharpiji* was.

Then came Brown to unceremoniously erase any and all glimmer of hope from poor Shinasi’s eyes. “I actually have no idea what this so-called MMORPG is, young man.” Having died exactly hundred and nineteen years before the release of the first multi-user dungeon (MUD), the aptly named MUD1, didn’t leave much chance for Brown to learn what an MMO or an RPG was.

“We don’t call him an ‘old man’ for nothing.” added Ayomide. “He seems to know nothing that the other otherworlders know by heart.”

“I suspect that is because the other Awmereighkans come from a completely different age compared to me.” Brown was still intrigued by the prospect of a 21st century USA potentially existing at the same time as the 19th century USA that he was ungraciously expelled from. Both of them somehow existing at the same time was the most ‘rational’ way he had managed to resolve the question of how he and Jacob could meet from more than a century away. Even then, this answer was quite unsatisfactory to him, but how could a 19th century man even manage to begin thinking of such topics? The old man simply lacked the words needed to describe the unreal situation he was observing. “Oh, what hath God wrought...” muttered Brown upon such contemplation. The alien reality that he found himself had managed to defeat Brown a long time ago.

Shinasi decided to let Brown be left existentially flabbergasted while he continued talking “As for what the terms I talked about mean, ‘have loot sharing enabled’ means that you should equally share your loot between your party members, and ‘make sure you don’t accidentally use public chat instead of party chat’ means that private manners should remain private.”

“I think you forgot the one about ‘kill stealing’.” reminded Ayomide.

“Right, that one is a bit harder to get for outsiders.” Shinasi continued on to explain what might be the most important article of the adventurer’s code “That means that you should leave the killing of an enemy to the person who has dealt the most damage to it so that they can get the XP that they deserve.”

“*Ekspee?*” Brown was honestly getting tired of all the weird abbreviations. “What might that mean, young man?”

“It stands for ‘experience points’ in the Awmereighkan language if I remember correctly.” The one to reply was Ayomide. “That Jacob always loved to brag about his experience points to customers. He and his former party members apparently engaged in an activity called ‘grinding’ to raise these points.” She added a shrug. “For what reason I don’t know.”

Shinasi was more than happy to exposit even more. “You see, these experience points drop from everything you hunt down. This XP is some sort of magic energy that improves your strength when you collect enough of it, and those who engaged in ememoharpiji would strive to collect as much as they could to ‘level up’ and reach new heights.”

“These ‘points’ are supposed to ‘drop’ from everything you slay?” asked Brown, who had done a fair bit of slime hunting in Gemeinplatz. “I’ve never seen anything unusual drop that I could call an ‘experience point’.”

“Oh? I thought that otherworlders could see them.” Now was Shinasi’s turn to be surprised. “Apparently these XP points were visible on Örf, but no one in Gemeinplatz has visually seen them like the otherworlders describe.” His mind went to a rumor he had heard on the playground as a child. “I even once heard that the otherworlders could even open up a ‘window’ to look up their ‘stats’ gained by leveling up.”

“I can open up windows, young man, but I talk about the ordinary windows that are tangible and make some sort of sense.” Gamer lingo was most enigmatic to John Brown. He really wished that

he could meet a 21st century otherworlder who'd explain all this nonsense to him.

"Well, maybe it's just an old man thing." Ayomide simply brushed off all of Brown's existential crises thusly. "People's senses tend to dull as they get older."

"Young lady, you need to learn how to respect your elders!" Brown would definitely need to set up a proper lecture, with an appropriate number of quotes from the Bible and ancient Greek classics, to teach her how old people didn't deserve to be dismissed just because they couldn't sense some 'experience points'.

"Sorry old man." Contrary to Brown's observations, Ayomide wasn't trying to be disrespectful. She simply had lacked any sort of upbringing that had her interact with any elders, for old slaves tended to be discarded long before they reached their 60s like Brown did, and the rude old customers (who were also oft the most lecherous despite also being the ones who were oft most religious) in the maid café hadn't exactly inspired a healthy sense of 'respect for the elderly' within her.

"Anyways," Shinasi deliberately entered the scene once more to dispel the lightly tense atmosphere "adventurers still hunt for XP, despite the experience points in Gemeinplatz being invisible or intangible."

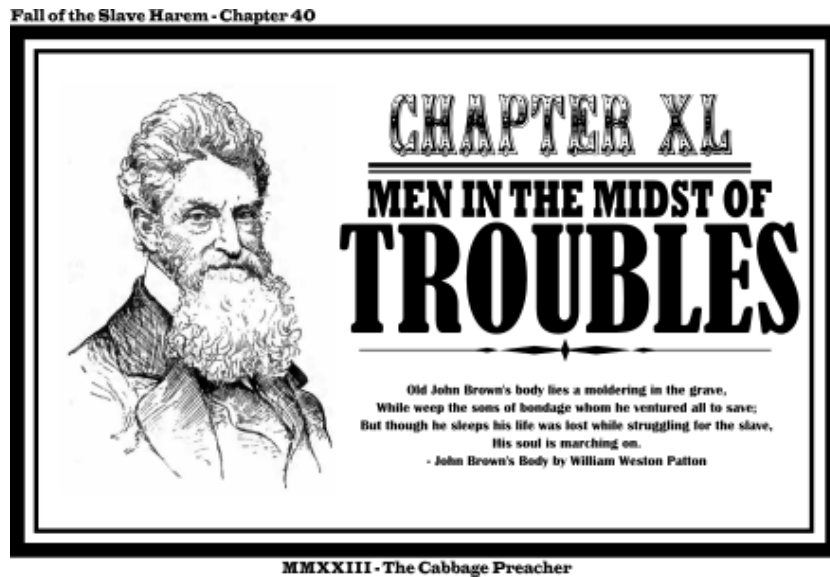
"Wait, you can't see or feel the XP?" Ayomide's eyebrow was raised up high with skepticism. "So, you believe in a force that you can't properly observe? How can you tell if experience points are real?" She made a simple comment that could be made about many beliefs in and outside of Gemeinplatz.

Shinasi scratched his head. "I mean... I do feel stronger after defeating a foe, which means that I must be gaining experience points." Then he made an argument that was simply flawless in its nature. "Hey, all the otherworlders and adventurers can have been wrong about experience points, right? I'm just a newbie adventurer who hasn't felt the true strength of XP yet." Simply put, due to an absence of MMORPG-like mechanics in Gemeinplatz making XP actually real, 'experience points' had become something akin to a pagan belief practiced amongst adventurers. Before Brown could interrupt him with further questions, Shinasi suddenly stopped walking. "Oh, here's a place that we could grind for XP now." He pointed towards a small divergence in the path, which slowly got wider and cleaner as it approached it.

"Hmm? Where would that lead us to, young man?" Brown was quite curious as to what 'grinding' might entail.

"It's a dungeon, the Minor Curry Dungeon to be exact." His adventurer instincts made him take a few steps towards the place. "I've been here plenty of times with my old party. Wanna take a look?"

Chapter 43: Chapter XL – Men in the midst of troubles.



Dungeons. A staple in RPGs ever since the aptly named Dungeons & I-Don't-Want-the-Pinkertons-Coming-After-Me-So-I-Won't-Infringe-On-Copyright (which, funnily enough, the [in]famous Pinkertons were established 9 years before old John Brown got isekai'd; they'd later act as personal bodyguards for Abraham Lincoln and conduct acts of espionage against the Confederates). Places of endless loot, confusing map layouts, and grindy enemies that refuse to die which makes one feels like they're crawling in the hellish dungeon (hence why it is called a 'dungeon crawl', or so this humble author thinks).

Of course, in a land like Gemeinplatz, dungeons are also aplenty. Scattered around convenient spots on the map, the humble adventurer may be found in their natural habitat loitering around these places. These shrines of loot beckon these adventurers, as if a mermaid singing a sweet song packed into the form of an underground structure, and many lose their lives (in terms of time wasted and actual lives lost, but mostly wasted time) in 'the grind' while looking for that one legendary drop that'll grant them salvation from the endless monotony of running the same dungeon over and over again.

Thus Shinasi was here, having been called upon the Minor Curry Dungeon and her equally minor loot, in front of the entrance with the oddest party he had ever seen. Brown, Ayomide, Shinasi, it was quite the hodgepodge of names who were all united in curiosity. As for the entrance itself, contrary to the remarkable nature of the names present in front of it, it was quite unremarkable. It was a gate of stone, looking ancient while not having somehow crumbled into dust,

One noticeable detail was that some of the stones of the dungeon had rusted, twisted bars of metal sticking out from them, with little indentations on them that looked like some sort of fashionable avant-garde pattern. Brown was quite interested in this odd metal, and he tried to break it off to no avail. The metal was quite strong, even in its rusted form. Brown turned to Shinasi for help "What is this? Do you have any idea, young man?"

"It's what the fellows back at the Adventurer's Guild would call 'dungeonium'." Shinasi did his best to grab some for himself, but he too failed to break the metal out from the stone. "It's quite the tough thing, as you can see. Apparently, some smiths in the capital take these to forge blades from

them, though I have no idea you'd even begin melting this down." He grabbed onto the metal with even more force, to show how tough it was as it budged not.

While the men were busy, Ayomide had gotten quite curious after having seen the rusted metal. If she could heal people, could she 'heal' metal as well? It was quite the curious question, so she took hand of a bar. She paused to think of a spell name that might work. In the end Ayomide decided to go with a simple "[Derust]!", a new word that she had invented at this moment. To her surprise, the small area of the metal her hands touched shed its rust off and from under it a shiny gray metal became visible. The catgirl wizard quickly dusted off the shed rust from her hands, and proudly displayed her work to her party members.

A metal being rid of its dust was a whole lot less miraculous than having his limb be regrown, so Brown wasn't too surprised by the magic act itself. "Interesting." Brown caressed the newly cleaned bit of the metal, feeling its cold touch. "This feels just like iron, or steel."

"Steel?" Shinasi raised his brow. "Why would they put something as precious as steel in the walls?" To him, this sounded like putting gold in the walls: a ridiculous proposition.

Brown didn't know either; he shook his head to signal his ignorance in the realm of such odd construction techniques. He had died a few decades before reinforced concrete, which includes sticking bars of steel into concrete to make structures more tensile, had become widespread in the United States thanks to the experiments of his abolitionist comrade (and former patron) Thaddeus Hyatt (his 1877 report was, not-so-laconically, titled '*An Account of Some Experiments with Portland-Cement-Concrete Combined with Iron as a Building Material, with Reference to Economy of Metal in Construction and for Security against Fire in the Making of Roofs, Floors, and Walking Surfaces*', which is only a few words short of being as long as the average isekai title).

After having expounded more than enough about the history of reinforced concrete, let us return back to the ordinary adventures of John Brown and the abolitionist catgirl wizard Ayomide.

Being unable to do anything with the odd bits of dungeonium, the party was about to enter the dungeon when they heard foreign screams, one male other female, coming from inside.

"*Tasukete! Āa!*"

"*Adohe shelmiy Boczhe, mönsöé!*"

Whatever they were screaming about, the people inside the dungeon didn't seem to be having fun judging from the volume and desperation of their shrieks. Brown immediately jumped into the dark depths of the dungeon, only to be stopped by the *dark* depths of the dungeon which he couldn't see.

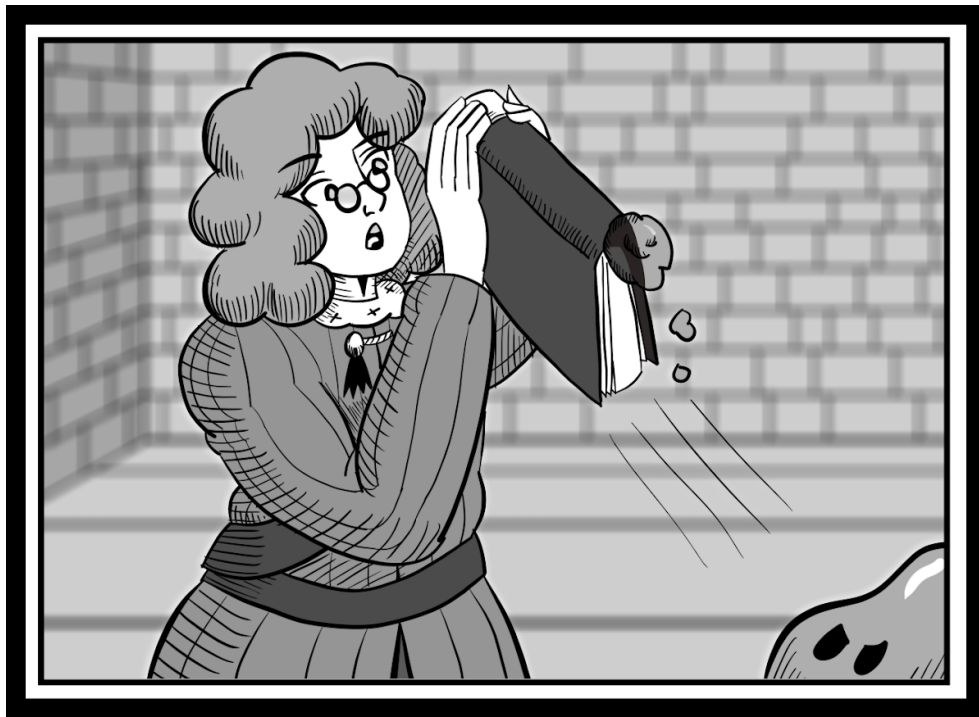
"Old man! Wait a sec!" Ayomide and Shinasi came running after him. First, there was darkness. "You do know that sunlight doesn't reach underground, right? What was the word... Right! [Luminate]!" Then Ayomide let there be light, in the form of a dimly glowing orb in her hand. The dull grey walls of the dungeon were barely visible in the dim light, but Ayomide couldn't bother lest she spend all her magic shining like a lighthouse.

"We and I have no time for a comeback, young lady, let us proceed and find the source of the screams!" Brown began running again, at an impressive speed for his age. Having (probably innocent) people die wasn't exactly a thing that he liked. Running through the corridor they had to dodge a myriad of things: bones, slime, other discarded items... In such a minor dungeon, there weren't any enemies looking to murder them during their brisk jog. What would have been there

had most likely been pulverized by the recent visit of a novice group, judging from all the unharvested slime that they had left behind. Following a couple more screams a bit deeper into the damp and dark dungeon, the group found their targets struggling with the familiar figure of a slime.

“Kowai! Suraimu kowai!” The male voice belonged to a bloke who had huddled into the corner into a fetal position while crying and quaking in fear. From her familiarity with customers in the maid café, Ayomide was able to guess that the language spoken by him was that of the otherworldly land of *Nehoun* from Örf / Earth.

Thankfully, for the guy crying in the corner, there seemed to be someone a bit braver than him. *“Boczhe, adoh ezoc! Eizé zot?!”* Instead of the desperate crying done by the other otherworlder, her cries were more ones of confusion and anger. She was furiously beating the slime with an overly thick book, one that had letters on its cover not recognizable to anyone in Brown’s party. However, mostly thanks to the blue gambeson she wore, she didn’t look too alien in Gemeinplatz. Her long and curly golden hair, which was actually just cheap wig covering her actual hair, bobbed up and down along with her tiny spectacles as she continuously leaned forward to beat the monster into a fine pulp. Due to slimes being slimy creatures, her method of bludgeoning the slime failed to damage it much, only serving to stutter the creature.



The errant pair which John Brown encountered.

The bespectacled woman was saved by Ayomide, who carefully sent a spear flying using wind magic to maneuver the spear to make sure that her spear wouldn’t end up lodged in the larger target. “Pop” went the slime, and suddenly there was quiet for there were no more things to scream and shout about.

The woman who had been beating the slime shook her boots in an attempt to fling the slime off of it while the man in the corner slowly got off after having sufficiently calmed down. He was a twenty-something, with a protagonistly face which needed no further description except that he had a shadow of facial hair plastered on his face: an unusual trait for isekai protagonists to have facial hair at all.

Brown was intrigued by an entirely different thing, his 19th-century self was surprised to see that the Eastern man in front of him wore a Western suit and tie. He had only come face to face with Jacob, so he hadn't exactly gotten a chance to see any other otherworlders which might dispel his conceptions of "the Orient". Seeing that the man in front of him was too shook to start conversation, Brown had to break the ice. "Good sir, might I have your name? My name is Isaac Smith." Ayomide stared daggers at the new otherworlders, while Shinasi curiously watched the ones they had unexpectedly encountered.

"*Ee?!*" The man in front of Brown paused when he heard the speech. "How- How can I understand you?" he replied, clearly surprised at his own ability to understand the language of Gemeinplatz. He quickly switched gears back to not be discourteous. "Thanks for your help, Mister Smith. I am Watanabe Haruto, glad to meet you." An awkward exchange commenced between them as Watanabe courteously bowed down while Brown extended his hand for a handshake. In the end Watanabe stopped bowing to shake Brown's hand.

Suddenly, the slime-beating woman interjected. "...Wait, I can understand them too. How the-" She stopped herself from saying something utterly uncouth. She proceeded to put her hand above her heart and do a slight curtsy, though unlike Watanabe she had decided to extend her gratitude towards the one who threw the spear. "Thank you for your assistance, madame. I'd be Doctor Raban Rabanowicz Rabanow of Kiyelm, but you can just call me Doctor Rabanowicz..." Her voice faded when she noticed something odd that sat on top of Ayomide.

"Hm?" Watanabe's gaze shifted, after having realized he had thanked the wrong person. "*Arere?!*" Excitement was added to his voice when he noticed the same thing that Rabanowicz had noticed. "Cat ears!"

"...And a tail. How utterly queer." Rabanowicz adjusted her spectacles, clearly being enamored by this new discovery.

"Oh, for..." Ayomide groaned. She had to go through the same procedure with every otherworlder; she did wonder as to how they had all managed to not see a catgirl for all their life. "Yes, yes, I have ears and a tail. My name is Ayomide, no you cannot touch them. Can we skip this please?"

"Sorry." Watanabe retreated to a safe distance while Rabanowicz kept peeking curiously towards Ayomide. "So, would ye happen to know where we currently are?"

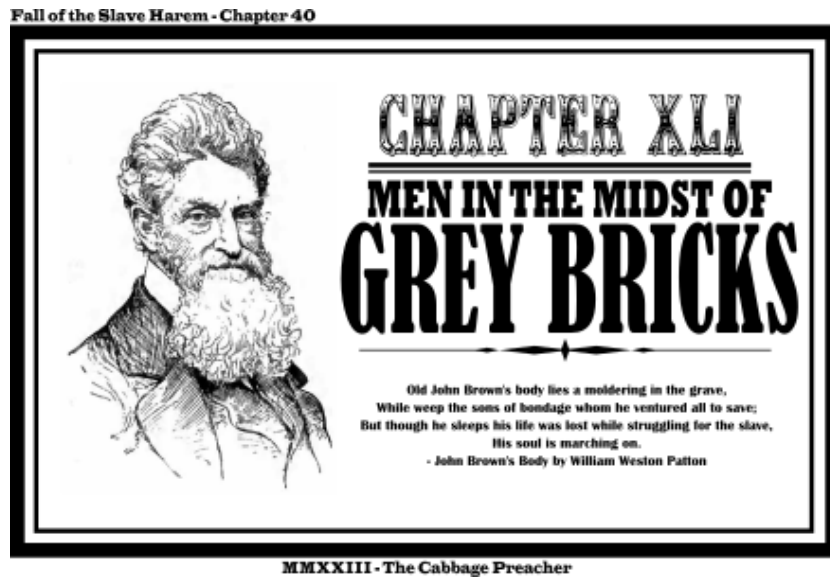
"The Minor Curry Dungeon." Shinasi was the only one who actually remembered the name of the dungeon. "In Gemeinplatz" he added to make sure that their otherworlder guests wouldn't be too confused.

"*Ge... Gema'inpuradzu?*" Watanabe scanned the area around him just to be even more sure. "I guess we're not in Cabbagelandetia anymore. Should've understood from the sudden appearance of slimes and catgirls..." He suddenly cheered; his hands held right up to the sky. "Oh, finally I get to get out of that low fantasy snore-world into something that looks like proper high fantasy!"

Brown, Ayomide and Shinasi looked at Rabanowicz, as if they expected an answer for her partner's odd words. "I know not what he speaks of." She adjusted her spectacles once more, its tiny frame kept constantly doing its best to fall off from her nose. "He is under a terrible affliction of the mind under which he thinks of himself as being part of something called an '*isékai*'."

Thus, the abolitionists had been introduced to an errant pair of otherworlders.

Chapter 44: Chapter XLI – Men in the midst of grey bricks.



Lots of bricks. A whole lot more gray. Blue bits of battered slime. A little bit more gray. The essence of an insignificant, minor dungeon as the one that Brown and co had found themselves in could be described as such.

“So, this is it, young man?” Brown looked around the aforementioned scene while their unexpected guests did their best to psychologically recover from being slimed so suddenly. “I must say, these ‘dungeons’ seem to be quite underwhelming.”

Shinasi himself was busy searching for any loot, but he too had reached a disappointing conclusion. “Normally there are a whole lot more encounters. Another party must have visited recently.” He patted the familiar gray brick of the dungeon. “Plus, these minor dungeons are nothing too impressive. Believe me, I think you’d be impressed if you ever saw the dungeons near the Imperial capital.” For now however, his party was stuck in a place that wouldn’t look amiss on a dungeon crawler made for the Commodore 64.

Ayomide’s eyes shined with curiosity. “Oh? How’d those in the capital look like?”

Shinasi erred and hummed for a while before his head dejectedly slanted down. “To be truthful,” he was normally not above making fabrications about his exploits, being quite below it in fact, but Ayomide wasn’t any old wench in the tavern “the Minor Curry Dungeon is the only dungeon I’ve been into. There is only the one at the peak of Mount Curry that’s nearby.”

“Boo.” Ayomide gave a playful slap to Shinasi’s unguarded shoulder. “What a lousy adventurer you are.”

“I’m sure the young man is better off not entering even bigger dungeons.” Still unable to clear the association between ‘dungeon’ and ‘incarceration’, Brown wasn’t too comfortable with staying in the drab underground basement. “God forbid, I don’t get why you’d willingly throw yourself in a dungeon.”

“Indeed, I believe that we are too slow for people breaking out of prison.” One of their new acquaintances, Rabanowicz, looked ready to smash some skulls with her book. “I know not why we are here, but I do know that I have committed no crimes in the eyes of state or the One Above.”

Her partner-in-crime Watanabe did his best to make her lower her dangerous weapon of literature. “Doctor, we aren’t breaking anyone out of anywhere. I’ll give you the detailed explanation later, but we are mostly safe save for those slimes that just attacked us.”

“What the gentleman over there just said.” Shinasi was surprised at how much he could agree with the otherworlder. “This is a place to battle monsters and loot some loot. I don’t know why you two are here, but weird things always tend to happen with you otherworlders... Like the place you just got up from.” A few of the bricks on the wall had shifted from where Watanabe had been crouching, the weight of his whole body causing the bricks to somewhat go inwards into another room. “I’m pretty sure I’ve never seen that here.” Shinasi approached the newly formed dent in the wall for a closer look. He kicked and prodded the bricks for a while until they collapsed and revealed a dark corridor. “Ayomide, shed us some light please?”

Ayomide pushed through the small crowd to [Luminate] the corridor. Her lamination revealed that this corridor was not formed of gray bricks like the rest of the dungeon, but another form of gray stone that continuously stretched on for seemingly no end. The only thing breaking it apart were the scant cracks on the wall which had the occasional drop of water escape between them. It wasn’t the most inviting of all sights, to say the least. Looking at such a sight, reasonable people would nope out and not enter. People in works of fantasy, however, tend to go into any place as long as it’s interesting enough and the plot demands it. “Old man,” Shinasi stared at the secret passageway with lust: lust for loot “I think we just hit the jackpot.”

Brown looked at the dark corridor for a second before turning back. He wasn’t a coward; he was just a rational human being who didn’t run on fantasy logic. “We have a mission, remember? We can’t go around being distracted by every divergence that comes our way.”

“Yes, I’d rather not get eaten by the boogeymen or whatnot that lie there.” Just one peek at the unending darkness was enough for Ayomide to shiver.

“While the prospect of a dungeon is exciting, I’d like it if we could be lead outside and to the closest human settlement.” Watanabe closed the discussion with this final statement.

“Aw, c’mon...” Shinasi was outvoted 4-to-1. The rules of democracy dictated that they should return back, and return back he’d do if he didn’t suddenly hear the ground below him rumble. “Do- I’m not drunk, am I?! The ground is shaking!”

“I’m as sober as the Lord made me and I can confirm that the ground *is* shaking!” Brown and the rest of the party scrambled to hold on to the walls while the tremor got closer and closer. Eventually the rumble turned into noises of metal scraping into each other, a hellish noise akin to nails on a blackboard. “Oh Lord, please grant us some of your endless mercy!”

“Ah... Help us, oh help us... *Adohe*...” Desperate times called for desperate prayer from Rabanowicz. No matter how much she prayed though, she apparently didn’t have enough levels in Prayer to stop what was coming at them smashing the last few bricks that had been left unsmashed. It barged into the room from the corridor, suddenly halting once it made it into the middle.

“*What* hath God wrought?!”

“This...” Watanabe had to pause so that he could find the appropriate group of words to explain the thing in front of them “This giant death robot apparently!” He had managed to perfectly convey what was in front of them: a giant metal cube running on threads with three arms attached to the right, left and front of the cube. The top of the cube had a shiny, enigmatic black sphere which seemed to be continuously rotating around. Its body had a few markings on the brink of erasure: some sort of red rectangle, the numbers ‘4’ and ‘2’ in Arabic numerals, and other text-like markings which had become illegible due to how faded and scratched they were. Its body was rusty and dusty in general, showing that whoever or whatever made this machine had forgotten about it a long while ago.

“The giant death *what-*” The giant death robot in question used one of its many arms to slap Ayomide away, sending her away to a wall on the other side of the dungeon room. She crashed onto the wall before bouncing back onto the floor in an unrefined fashion. “The giant death *bastard!*”

“Why is *this* in this crappy minor dungeon?!” Shinasi rushed forward to help the battered Ayomide get back on her feet. He put his shield between them and the robot. “Are you fine?”

“I’ve been finer-” The aptly-nicknamed giant death robot once more rudely interrupted Ayomide’s speech, this time with rapid gunfire. One of its arms supported a multi-barreled weapon which spun around while readying itself to deliver more-than-suppressive fire.

Whirr-ra-tatatata...tatataclickclickclickclick!

Thankfully its systems didn’t seem to work too well for actually killing people. The giant death robot’s gun was focused on the brightest thing in the room: Ayomide’s lamination spell which floated way above her. All of its two-hundred bullets had made way for the ceiling, excavating a large hole through the bricks. Loose chunks of brick and rock rained down from the ceiling which hit the robot’s unsuspecting victims right on their heads. Thankfully no big chunks had dropped down, otherwise there would have been a sudden rise in traumatic head injuries in the Minor Curry Dungeon area.

“What do we do with this... thing?!” Brown got up from his crouched position. “Shinasi, do you know anything about this?”

Shinasi quickly spat out a small piece of rubble that had sneakily made its way into his mouth. “*Pweh-* My instincts are telling me that we should leg it!” As if the giant death robot had heard Shinasi’s intentions for escape, it quickly drove its threads towards the poor adventurer while making the ground rumble once more. He’d have become human meat paste if not for the timely intervention of Ayomide and a healthy dose of wind magic pushing him away.

“This thing definitely seems faster than us!” Ayomide took out the steel knife, courtesy of the late Watanabe Generico, and pointed it towards the giant death robot as if she was David challenging Goliath. “I don’t think our legs are gonna be carrying us as fast as we need them to.”

There was a temporary bout of silence. Brown, the old man, was in one corner without any magic or overpowered abilities and items to protect himself. Shinasi and Ayomide were in another corner, with the revolutionary catgirl on a limited supply of magic and Shinasi on a limited supply of skill. The errant otherworlders, Watanabe and Rabanowicz, were still busy trying to understand their situation. The giant death robot stared them down, trying to kill them for reasons that had been long forgotten. Its machinery whirred and stirred, echoes of an age long past.

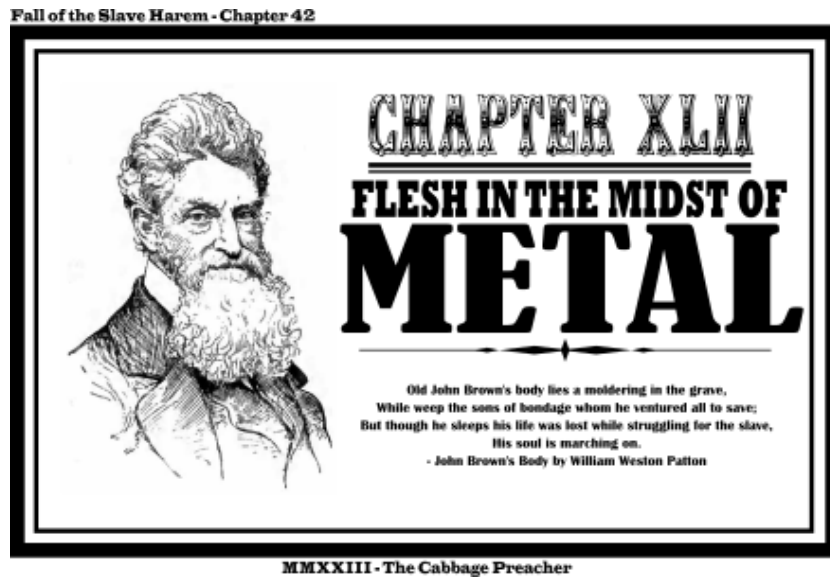
Then all hell broke loose.

In this chapter of the John Brown Isekai:



([Original meme](#) posted by u/Snoo_72851 on [r/JohnBrownIsekai](#))

Chapter 45: Chapter XLII – Flesh in the midst of metal.



The bricks of the dungeon crackled once more as the metal threads began rotating once more. Crack, crackle and a snap, the giant death robot marched on towards Ayomide and Shinasi once more.

Shinasi had to quickly sidestep once more to avoid the crazed machine. “What does this thing have against us in particular?!” He wasn’t too happy to have drawn the attention of the crazed metal beast.

John Brown, currently busy with not being chased by a giant death robot, was able to get a clearer analysis. “When this thing was shooting,” he pointed at the bullet holes on the roof “it was aiming too high, and all of the bullets were passing through the ball of light you’ve got over there.” As if confirming his statement, the giant death robot took a swing towards the magic light again.

Ayomide dodged the incoming arm by promptly ducking. She began taking a few steps back. “So I just need to get this thing off my tail?” She then ‘threw’ the ball of light to a deserted corner of the room, or to be more accurate, she made a motion as if she was throwing something and the ball of light slowly floated over to a corner. The giant death robot then followed the light as if it was a cat going after a ball of yarn. Just like a cat, the giant death robot continued taking swipes at the ball of light, the major difference being that a giant death robot’s swings were somewhat deadlier than that of a small cat.

The robot’s futile attack continued while the group in the dungeon chatted at a somewhat more leisurely fashion. “I’d say that it’d be prudent for us to make our way out.” Brown dusted off his coat, beard, and hands and got up, looking excited to get out of the dungeon. Watanabe and Rabanowicz had already made their way out of the room, presumably towards freedom. Only Shinasi seemed to be the one who was reluctant to leave. His eyes were fixated on the corridor which they hadn’t explored, his adventurer instincts telling him to just barge in there and hope for the best.

“I’d love to leave, but...” Ayomide’s eyes were focused on the ball of light she was maintaining. “Magic gets weaker the further you get away from it. At one point the light would be completely

gone and who knows what this beast will get up to after that point. It's pretty quick so I'm sure it can catch up to us."

"Then we can do some kiting." Shinasi found that no one in the room seemed to have any understanding of what a 'kiting' was, so he had to explain further without the odd gamer lingo. "You'll be in the back with the ball of light while the monster follows you at a safe rage."

"That may seem prudent to you, young man. We'd save ourselves; I assume that this thing is going to begin battling the sun once it's out." Brown was quite curious as to why the giant death robot focused so much on light, but he put those thoughts aside while continuing his theorycrafting. "What happens after the sun sets, however? It'd probably attack anyone carrying any source of light. Or brightly lit houses, those would be a target too."

"You are right..." Shinasi looked at the metal beast still clawing away at the magic light. Unleashing such a thing didn't seem like a good idea. "How do we defeat it then?"

"I don't know how you'll defeat it, but I'd like it if your brains could work faster!" Ayomide's mouth had formed into a small frown, her brows were furrowed, and a small drop of sweat had begun making its way down her forehead. "I can't exactly keep this thing shining all day!"

Brown began pacing around while thinking more frantically. Shinai stood still, he was more the type to tap his foot and cross his arms while thinking. The young adventurer intended to approach the robot to take a closer look. Despite his adventurous spirit however, he couldn't exactly bring himself to get closer to a few tons of giant death metal. Brown on the other hand gathered all the faith he had in the Lord and proceeded to charge at the robot with his saber (courtesy of the late Jacob's late patron). As expected the sword couldn't penetrate even through the rusted metal of the robot. All Brown managed to achieve in his attack was chipping a few pieces of rusty metal off as sparks flew from the meeting of metals. It seemed that faith in God couldn't melt steel beams no matter how much Brown tried. "It's no use, young lady." he said before giving one last whack of desperation to the giant death robot's body. "All I can do is remove the rust from this thing." After all sixty years of his life, the thing that had managed to finally defeat John Brown was a giant death robot.

"I think you'll be helping this thing if you remove the dust from it!" replied Shinasi, who had gathered a bit of courage and began poking the giant death robot with his spear. Javelins may be useful against armor as a certain nation under invasion may attest to, unfortunately for Brown and co stuck in the dungeon, Shinasi's spear was a primitive model which was a whole lot less effective against armor. "Though, this thing is so rusty that I bet you could get in its innards just by smashing all the rust out."

Brown didn't seem too pleased with Shinasi's sarcastic remark. "Too bad we didn't bring a pickaxe then!" Still, he switched to smashing the giant death robot with the hilt of his saber which was a whole more effective. Shinasi followed by pommeling the rusted body with the shaft of his spear. The pair looked like a bunch of angry cavemen or a pair of Luddites who had unexpectedly encountered technology. "Young lady, do you think you could hold on until we get this beast sufficiently ridden of rust?"

Ayomide saw what her comrades-in-arms were attempting, and couldn't help but sigh. They weren't making much progress; sabers and spears weren't efficient mining tools. The light she was providing had begun to get dimmer and dimmer as the seconds passed on. "Don't think I can."

Then Ayomide had a bright idea, or, an idea that was only metaphorically bright. “I think I can help you, but...”

“But?” Shinasi’s arms were beginning to get tired of constantly pommeling the giant death robot in futility. “We really need help here.”

“...the lights might go out for a bit.” Ayomide sluggishly approached the robot. There wasn’t much energy left in her after having been a living and breathing light source for so long. “Alright, I hope you aren’t too afraid of the dark.” She touched an especially rusty part of the robot, took a deep breath, and then chanted as loudly as she could: “[Derust]!” The magic light suddenly went off. The only thing anyone could hear was the sound of crackling and the giant death robot’s motor.

Things were fully silent for a minute, except for the robot swinging wildly, before Ayomide’s light appeared as dim as moonlight during a crescent moon. She was on the ground, out of breath and barely conscious. Such intense derusting wasn’t easy on one’s body. “Go- Go for it before I pass out!” she cried out with the last of her energy. Her body wasn’t moving at all, save for her eyes whizzing around to get a view of the scene.

Brown was quick to find what damage had been done: a giant hole had been opened in the giant death robot’s hull. Shinasi joined him in examining their patient, who was now busy with the dim light. “What are these? They don’t look like the organs of any beast.”

“I believe that this is some sort of machinery, young man.” Brown quickly leaned in to take a closer look. There were gears, wheels, shafts and a million other bits he couldn’t name. “Stick your shaft into the hole. Let us see what we can break.” He took initiative by doing his best to knock off some gears with his saber.

Shinasi began using his spear like a lever to bend the thin shafts spinning inside the giant death robot. Soon there were gears and broken shafts jumping around the machinery making a hellish noise. Having its innards turned into steel soup, the giant death robot eventually made a few sputters before giving up on movement. After another few seconds its engine stopped as well. It’s lifeless metal body became even more lifeless.

“Phew. That’s the beast dealt with.” Shinasi took his shaft out of the hole and wiped his brow. The near-death experience with the giant death robot wasn’t exactly the most pleasant thing to experience. “Ayomide, are you still alive down there?”

Ayomide gave a weak thumbs up while still laying on the ground. “Could use some help with getting up.” Shinasi quickly took ahold of Ayomide and got her up. She wasn’t in a state to walk unassisted, or so it seemed, so she wrapped her arms around the young adventurer for support.

“Thank the Lord for getting us out of this mess.” Brown spent a minute or two praying fervently while the others got their footing once more. “Now, I assume you’d like to go outside now?”

Shinasi’s eyes were still locked onto the dark corridor. Now that Ayomide’s light had dimmed, he noticed something interesting: the end of the corridor was shining a dim green. The giant death robot had only served to heighten his curiosity as to what it was protecting. “Captain, this giant death robot came from that room. There seems to be no more commotion coming from over there, I think there’d be no harm in us taking a loo- *Puah!*” His suggestion prompted Ayomide to tighten her arm coiled around Shinasi in anger.

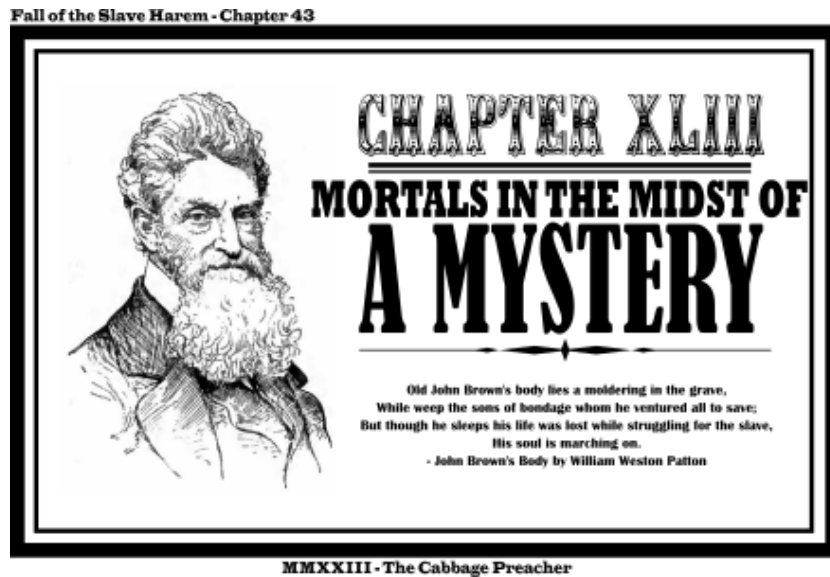
However, Brown had gotten intrigued too by this point. “I’d say that there’s no harm in taking a look.” With God on his side, he’d surely be fine. “Let us venture forth and see what this ‘dungeon’ may have in store for us.”

And so Brown and co marched on into the corridor. It wasn’t as long as it initially seemed, and in a minute of walking they were in another dimly lit room. What was intriguing was what this light was emanating off of: a large green orb, with shiny green liquid floating inside it, in the middle of the room about the size of a ripe cabbage which was held by several coiling vines. The rest of the room was covered in these vines as well. These vines were pulsating and sometimes giving a dim shine themselves, a scene both mesmerizing and terrifying in equal measures. Compared to the cacophony of the giant death robot, the room was absolutely silent save for the breathing of its three visitors.

Brown stood silent for a while, admiring and contemplating the scene. He then only had one thing to say: “Pray tell, what is this?”

Hello, dear reader. While most of your experiences with my work come through the written side of my business, I dabble in illustration as well, and my dabbling has resulted in me collaborating together with a good fellow nicknamed Arzvet to make a little indie fangame. *Parsee's Festival of Love and Jealousy* is free to play for all ye who are (or aren't) reading, and you can [download and play it from here](#) if you are interested in getting more information.

Chapter 46: Chapter XLIII – Mortals in the midst of a mystery.



The room was ever so silent, even after Brown's question as it received no answers. Vines still coiled, the green fluid inside the glass sphere pulsed and old Brown sat and pondered. Everything he had seen up to that point, even Ayomide's seemingly miraculous healing magic, had made a modicum of sense to him. This place? This place was a whole different thing compared to magical catgirls suddenly healing John Brown's arm. It just made no sense, with the giant death robots and the odd green liquid, it was as alien as little green men from Pluto or the modern incarnation of Mac-and-Cheese.

While Brown was most busy with trying to sort out his befuddled state, Shinasi was making rounds around the room while searching for loot. He found the place to be alien too, but that was to be expected out of a dungeon. Such exotic rooms usually meant exotic loot, or so he had heard. Shinasi's luck with loot wasn't exactly great, evident from the debts he had racked up before escaping Azdavay. Thinking about it, he did hope he'd find something to sell in case he encountered one of his old 'friends'. Buying that big jug of rakija for his trick back in the copper mine had only been possible with a fair bit of pleading and debt-making, not to mention everything from the past... It just made Shinasi's head hurt, so he stopped thinking about it further. He always managed to make ends meet one way or another, so he thought it was futile to make his head ache for something he would manage anyways. Perhaps the old man wouldn't notice a few groschen missing from his bag of cash?

Fortunately for our adventuring friend, it seemed that the Lord, or whoever was in charge of Gemeinplatz, had decided to grant His grace upon his sullen face. The center of the room only contained the large orb, but the corners of it had various bits of equipment... along with scattered bits of bone that Shinasi did his best to ignore. Like any good adventurer Shinasi carried a knapsack with him, and he stuffed a few small and valuable-looking items to treat himself after the fight with the giant death robot. Rings were the best, they were commonly enchanted with something-or-another that made them valuable if not for the ring itself, followed by other items of jewelry. The bits of bone on the ground didn't need them anyways, and respect for the dead wasn't an article of the adventurer's code. Shinasi even begun humming a little tune while he did his

collecting, which would make any outside observer think he was some sort of psychopath for being so cheerful around the fleshless remains of his fellow adventurers.

As for the catgirl in the room, she had been focusing on the green orb in the middle of the room. It looked quite mesmerizing, hues of dark and light green coming off of the liquid swimming inside it. Ayomide found herself slowly taking steps towards it out of sheer curiosity, inching ever so closer to the orb. She hesitated a bit, hovering her hand over the orb, before being unable to resist her urge to give it a gentle touch. The orb reacted to that gentle touch with a violent outburst of green light. Everyone in the room, except for Shinasi who was crouched towards the opposite direction of the orb while looting, found themselves temporarily blinded as if the fantastical equivalent of a flashbang had gone off.

The light slowly subsided, Ayomide slowly opened her eyes, and slowly she noticed that the orb was no more. In its place was a shining green gem of a similar green color, lazily floating around and bobbing up and down. Ayomide hesitated once more before grabbing this odd gem. Thankfully no fantastic flashbangs went off this time; on the contrary, the room was quite dark now that there was no odd green orb to give light.

“Who turned off the lights?” said Shinasi, turning back from his bout of looting. “I quite liked the... odd green orb.”

Brown rubbed his eyes, still unable to see properly from his eyes being so suddenly fried. He found Ayomide holding a green gem that seemed to have spontaneously appeared. “What is that, that thing in your hands, young lady?”

Ayomide shrugged. “Do I look like I know what this is? I just touched the orb.” She was already tired from all the previous magic she had done, but having light seemed really important to her. “[Luminate].” As expected, a ball of light came out; as unexpected, it came out of the gem and not her hands. It was also a whole lot brighter than it would usually be, too bright in fact. Ayomide had to focus a bit to lower the ball’s brightness down. “What the?”

“Oh, I think it’s one of those things that the magic people use to buff their spells.” Using gems and other precious materials was common amongst mages who could afford it, as Shinasi was currently attesting to. “Apparently stuff like that helps you conduct your magic better.”

“Right, right. I’ve seen those mages with their wooden sticks and orbs.” Ayomide had forgotten to ever make herself a staff, with all the other work she had to do. “Though, I think that precious gems are usually found in mines, are they not?”

All the loot in the room, the vines and the odd green orb, something finally clicked within Shinasi’s mind. “Ah! I think I know what this room is?”

“Is it a mine?” Ayomide hadn’t exactly gotten the chance to observe many mines within her lifetime.

“No, it’s not something ordinary like a mine.” Shinasi closed his knapsack full of loot before continuing. “This is... what was it called exactly... Right! A ‘dungeon core’!” He pointed towards the place where the green orb used to be. “These places are the heart of a dungeon or something like that. I don’t really know what they exactly do, to be honest. I’ve only heard rumors about such places, not went into one until now.” He looked around the room one more time. “Though, isn’t there supposed to be some big boss monster here... Oh.” He regretted saying that as soon as the sentence was finished. Setting off flags was a big no-no in Gemeinplatz, and Shinasi was sure he

had set the biggest and reddest flag of all. The adventurer readied his spear and shield, ready for a boss to dramatically make its grand entrance.

“Big bad monster? I believe we already have slain one, and its corpse is standing right outside this room. Thank the Lord we finished the fight without major problems.” Brown was pretty relaxed, so was Ayomide.

“Yeah, we’re fine. Nothing is going to happen.” Ayomide laughed it away, happy that she wasn’t going to be beaten by another giant death robot or something akin to it.

“People, please...” Shinasi had only gotten more nervous. “You shouldn’t tempt fate.” His eyes were shifting around the room in anticipation of an attack.

“Don’t worry young man, our Heavenly Father is watching over us. Fate isn’t a matter which can be tempted save for the intervention of the Lord above.” Being perhaps the most fatalistic man in the universe, Brown was as calm as anyone could be.

Sometimes, the ‘intervention of the Lord above’ includes giant death robots, added Ayomide. “Let’s return then. I don’t think there’s much more in this dungeon.” All the valuables had been conveniently taken by Shinasi. “Aren’t you coming, Shinasi?”

Shinasi looked around the room a few more times, before drawing a large sigh. “Okay, maybe the robot *was* the boss of this room.” He put away his shield, took on a more relaxed posture, and intended to follow his party out.

However, things do tend to go south the moment one stops being alert as dictated by the rules of drama and tension. Suddenly the vines behind them began moving on their own, coalescing around the empty space left behind by the green orb. The vines quickly coiled around themselves to take on a vaguely humanoid form, and black miasma began coalescing around the ‘head’. After a while this black miasma became white and formed a plant-like shape resembling an onion with a tulip perched on top of it. This new monster looked very similar to the weaponnapper encountered by Brown and co earlier, though it was a whole lot taller and intimidating with three eyes bobbing up and down from its onion-shaped head. It quickly grabbed the leftover equipment, mostly rusted junk, from the room with its countless vines.

“Okay, what sort of thing is this?!” shouted Shinasi upon witnessing this new monster form in front of his eyes. Their path to escape was quickly blocked by thick vines.

Ayomide pointed her new gem towards the monster. “Nothing friendly, clearly.” The monster slashed a sword towards them as if to confirm her statement. Ayomide dodged to the side while keeping the gem pointed towards the humanoid weaponnapper. Its eyes had caught the attention of the catgirl. After having had her eyes blasted with light, she wanted to take revenge from the dungeon and its inhabitants. Ayomide quickly invented a new name for the spell she had in mind, using the last of her energy to chant “Everyone, close your eyes! [Luminate Spear]!”

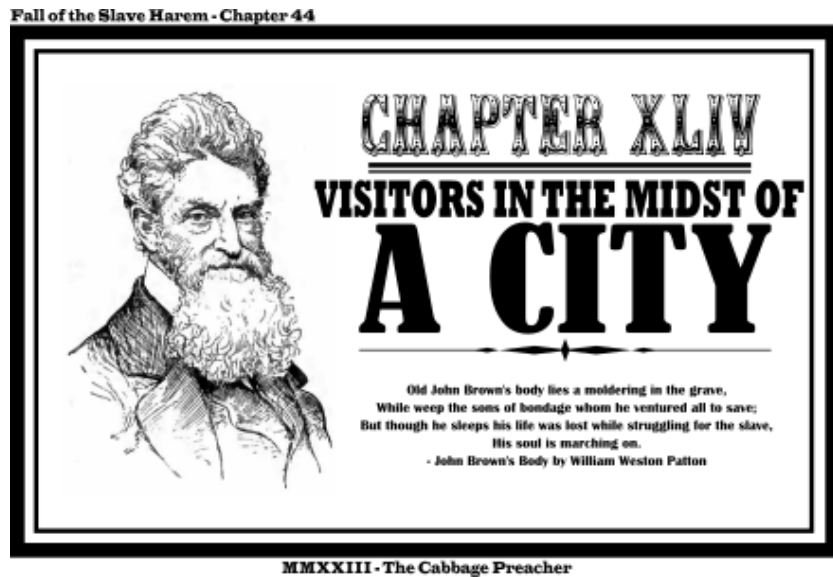
The name of the attack sounded like it belonged to a badly-localized JRPG, but that was the norm for spell names in Gemeinplatz. Thankfully the quality of the spell name had no bearing on the spell itself, and the gem shot out a large beam of warm orange light directly towards the weaponnapper’s three eyes. Unlike Brown and Shinasi who could understand human speech, the weaponnapper had not been able to shield its eyes in time for the attack. It thrashed around, completely blind, letting its blocking vines go in confusion.

“Captain, what do we do?” Shinasi instinctively took a few steps back towards the exit with his shield pointing towards the weaponnapper.

“You see, young man and young lady.” Brown pointed his saber towards the monster. “Bravery and honor are important virtues for anyone to hold. Our Maker has sent us here to battle with various hardships in life, whether it be marital issues or giant monsters.” Shinasi looked at the old man as if he was crazy. Was he really about to charge this thing down, with all of them being already tired from the fight with the giant death robot? “But, in life, there is also no shame in noticing the fact that there is a giant onion-tulip beast about to pulverize you. So, as I’ve thoroughly learned while fighting in Kansas,” Brown took a few steps back “there is no dishonor in a tactical retreat!” Thus, old John Brown began running away along with everyone else. He was quite the sane man, and sanity dictated that one shouldn’t fight a giant onion monster after having fought a giant death robot.

Thankfully the corridor leading to the dungeon core was narrow enough that the weaponnapper couldn’t follow them, save for a few vines doing their best to snatch someone up. Shinasi and Brown poked and prodded the vines while running, and Ayomide did her best to conserve all her remaining little energy to running. Eventually they were out once again into the great outdoors, where there was plenty of fresh air and none of giant death robots.

Chapter 47: Chapter XLIV – Visitors in the midst of a city.



27th of Summer, 5859
Imperial Highway №04-765, Outskirts of the City of Casamonu



John Brown was done with giant death robots, giant death onions, anything to do with large sizes. Unfortunately for old Brown, he was en route to a large city, the largest one in Casamonu and the namesake of the county in fact. Its presence could be felt even if the city was far away: the desire path was suddenly cut off by a paved road leading to the city. It was quite a wide one, made with stone bricks sourced from Mount Curry lined up as to allow up to two carriages to pass through simultaneously.

There was a milestone next to the intersection of the desire path, declaring that this road was “Imperial Highway №04-765” in English and a few other languages that Brown nor anyone else in his party could read. The sides of this milestone contained the many names of the patrons of this highway, starting at the top with “the gracious Mayor Erkan of Kasatmonu, son of Erkan of

Kasatmonu” two millenia ago, continuing after another millenium with “His Imperial Majesty Glory IV Earlyriser” and ending with “the ever-generous Sir Kim Seong-min of Hangvuk” a year ago. Brown could at least admire the civic spirit shown by a road having been kept alive for so long, though he’d appreciate it a bit more if this road was not maintained by slave labor.

Ayomide appreciated the road a bit less. She, in a minor act of protest against the empire, turned over one of the loose bricks on the road and tossed it away into the woods. It was a joy to imagine some pompous nobleman’s carriage being ruined by this missing stone, and joy was a thing that fugitives desperately lacked.

Shinasi watched as the stone flew away deep into the woods. “I’d be careful with that.” said the adventurer “This entire road is bona fide imperial property. What you did would get the same punishment as the one you’d get if you broke into his palace and chucked one of the vases out of the window.”

“Oh? Really?” This only served to goad Ayomide further. She spat spitefully in spite of Shinasi’s warning, her spittle of spit landing on one of the stones. “And is this equivalent to spitting on his balding head?” She’d go further with defiling the road if not for John Brown angrily staring them down.

Shinasi sighed. “I don’t know why I warned you. It’s not like they can hang you twice for being a fugitive *and* lese-majesty.”

“They *can* do that if I end up not dying like the old man.” Shinasi and Ayomide couldn’t help but laugh in the face of their grim situation. Humor was the only thing keeping them sane from the real threat of capture and death.

“I do appreciate your enthusiasm in harming enemy infrastructure” said Brown, suddenly butting into the conversation “but we’ll be doing that in an organized manner when the time comes, so please exercise patience” Brown had read about the Romans of old and how they had built extensive road networks that constituted the lifeline of the empire. Trade, armies, communication, all flow from roads and the Gemeinplatz Empire seemed to be aware of that fact evident by the magnificent road in front of old Brown. Seeing this road had already gotten his brain to work on plans to sabotage this road network for abolitionist gains. A couple of angry freemen who had extensive experience with pickaxes would be perfect for this job, not to mention arming a few of them to extort slave traders trying to use the road... The road of opportunity seemed to stretch as wide as the road in front of him, as if the Lord himself had paved this road network to grant these former slaves an opportunity. “Let us conduct our business in the city swiftly so that we may return to take care of other pressing issues in Libertycave.” For now however, they were just sheep entering a den of wolves.

“Aye aye captain.” replied Shinasi, doing his best not to kick away a brick from the road. The dungeon had eaten into their time quite a bit, and they were around two away from Casamonu when the sun slowly began its gentle retreat. Shinasi had planned the trip to end in one day, so he hadn’t told any of his party members to pack camping supplies. Thankfully, he had a contingency plan. “I think we’re getting close.”

“Close?” Brown looked around him to make sure. “I don’t see the city anywhere, young man.”

“I don’t mean the city.” He pointed to a structure just off the road. It was a monument of some sort, with a stone base and four rectangular pillars which had long been broken away. “We’re an hour away from our resting point.”

“Resting point?” Ayomide didn’t seem too comfortable with the idea. “I bet they don’t even have proper accommodations for a darkskin.”

Shinasi smiled to reassure her. “Don’t worry, I’m not talking about a roadside inn.” Ayomide looked at him hoping for an answer, but she didn’t receive one. “Be patient, you’ll soon find out.”

Ayomide’s patience was tasted for another whole hour as the party continued on the main road. The road was populated by the scant city guards on patrol and passersby as they got closer to Casamonu while the sun retreated even further. She was beginning to worry that they wouldn’t reach this ‘resting point’ until Shinasi stopped his march and pointed to a small village off the side of the road. “Here we are.”



Like any other village in Northern Gemeinplatz, the houses of this village were built with wood, fueled with wood and supported with wood. Some villages further away from the city would also have palisades constructed with wood, but this one lacked any as patrols from Casamonu provided ample protection to villages near the highway. Still, the entrance of the village had a watchtower built just in case. The watchtower had a sign hanging from it revealing the name of the village to be “Yellowclover” with a crude image of a yellow clover next to the text. There were no yellow clovers, or any clovers, around the area which made one wonder how it had gotten the name in the first place. Instead of plants there were plenty of fields around the village, filled with lentils, wheat and potatoes which need no further description. The denizens of the village had all retreated into their houses by now after having done their daily work, which meant that the village itself looked quite abandoned at this hour.

Shinasi lead his party to an inconspicuous house in the corner. It was small, almost falling apart and consisted of only one floor. He casually knocked on the door of the house, which was replied with sounds of someone rushing to open the door.

“Coming!” the voice inside opened the door, revealing a girl quite younger than Shinasi. She was the perfect stereotype of a village girl in Gemeinplatz: a colorful headscarf adorned with felt cut to look like various flowers, a long linen dress embroidered with various geometrical shapes held by a silk sash that must have cost quite the fortune trailing down to the floor. Locks of hairs colored like chestnuts flowed down from her headscarf, almost blocking her eyes.

She ignored the other visitors and focused on Shinasi. “Oh, brother!” They rushed to hug each other, Shinasi having to crouch to reach his sister.

“How have you been faring, Shirin?”

“Decently enough, we just returned from taking care of the fields. It’s a bit hard without you around.”

“Eh, I’m sure a strong lady like you can take care of any field.”

A round of mostly pointless small talk occurred between the siblings before Shirin’s attention was finally dragged back to the visitors standing outside the door.

“Who are these people? An escort quest?” Her eyes bounced between Brown and Ayomide. Both of them looked out of place like a conga line of neon pink elephants on a space station. The village folk didn’t frequently get to see an Awmereighkan and a catgirl stand side-to-side.

“I guess you could call this an escort mission, yes.” He stood aside to let Shirin see his comrades more clearly. “The old man is John Brown, and the catgirl is Ayomide. They’ll be staying the night here.”

“They’re guests then? Wait a sec.” Shirin turned around and quickly entered a room to the back while shouting “Father! We have guests, and brother!”

Shinasi entered his own house without hesitation while beckoning for his party to do the same. “Come in, make yourselves at home. This is my house after all.” Brown and Ayomide followed him to the indoors, which was as plain as the outside of the house. The only thing decorating the room was a faint rug laid on the wooden floor and a low table standing in the middle of it. They sat on the rug while Shinasi stood up to follow his sister into the room, asking “Would you like some tea, captain and Ayomide?” before leaving. They both nodded, being as athirst as anyone could reasonably be after having walked for an entire day. Noises of copperware clanging together and rushed speech could be heard from the backroom, before Shirin returned with a boiling iron teapot (tea was so important as to indulge in buying an iron one) and four teacups on a tray. She set the table, pouring the tilia tea while nervously eyeing the strangers.

The silence was broken by Shinasi barging into the room, shouting “Shinasi coming through!” while carrying an old man in his arms. He set the old man next to the wall, allowing him to lean towards the wall for support. He introduced this old man to his party as well “This is my father Shinasi.” Confirming this statement was the fact that Shinasi Jr. looked like the spitting image of Shinasi Sr., the only difference being their age and garb. Compared to Shinasi’s adventure-ready gambeson, Shinasi Sr.’s outfit consisted of a wool cap and shirt protected by a leather jacket.

“Glad to meet you, good sir and...” Shinasi Sr. was unsure of how to refer to Ayomide, pausing while looking at the catgirl.

“Lady.” replied Ayomide, making her equality clear.

“Excuse me, good lady. My son briefly introduced me to you while he was scrambling to get the tea ready.” He shook hands with the Awmereighkan, saluting Ayomide afterwards by tipping his cap towards the catgirl. “Please excuse us for not being able to accommodate you as befitting a gentleman.”

Brown took a sip of the tea to clear his throat. It was quite plain, lacking sugar or milk. “I’m just a simple merchant making my way to Casamonu, Mister Shinasi. We should be the ones apologizing for making your household go through the trouble of accommodating guests on such a short notice.” While talking, his attention was drawn to Shinasi Sr.’s legs. The senior Shinasi hadn’t moved his legs at all since his son had set him on the floor.

Shinasi Sr. seemed used to this type of attention, and he replied upon noticing Brown’s gaze “Don’t worry sir, I haven’t been able to move them for a while now.” He had to lean forwards to take hold of his own cup of tea. “Work-related accident from a long time ago, back when I was in Casamonu with my wife.” He looked a bit far-away while reminiscing about his past. The old man seemed be the type who loves to talk about his life story to strangers without being prompted, though this was a common trait among older humans. “We were carrying a bunch of stuff off of a carriage, one that was stuffed to the brim. I try to tell the lord ‘Oh dear sir, we should get a bunch more people to carry these’, but does the idiot listen? Of course not, the entire thing came crashing down and crushed us to death.” He didn’t need to tell the rest of the story for one to understand what the result of this crushing was.

Shirin yawned, and Shinasi was twiddling his thumbs while his dad was retelling the same story for the umpteenth time. Sure, hearing about how their mother died was tragic for the first few times, but the emotional impact of the story tended to fade with time especially when his father tended to tell the tale of his tragic backstory to each and every guest that happened to come by their humble abode. The entirety of Gemeinplatz had probably heard of the story of Shinasi Sr. by now, and it would be no surprise if a bard or two had composed songs about his tale by now.

Having sufficiently retold his tale, Shinasi Sr. turned to his thumb-twiddling son. “I hope your journey was safe? All the merchants passing by have been telling us about how dangerous the roads are because of fugitives.”

It was surprising how quickly rumors of the ‘roving bands of escaping slaves ambushing merchants’ spread considering that the League of Gileadites had not engaged in any activities of that sort yet. Brown didn’t find it too surprising however; he knew very well how rumors about escaped slaves tended to be exaggerated and fabricated by an anxious populace. He found this rising fear of a slave rebellion to be a healthy thing. Let them fear the oppressed rising up and overthrowing them, for their fears are not unfounded.

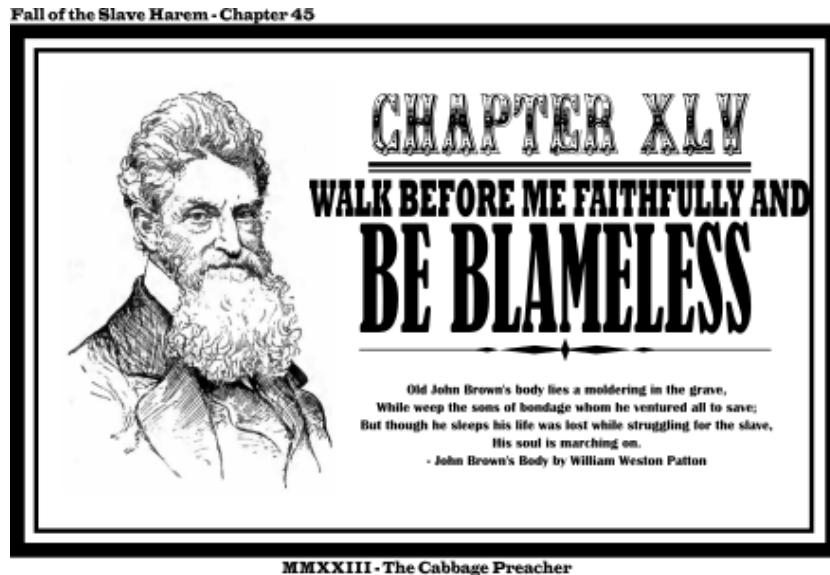
Shinasi couldn’t help but hesitate with lying to his own father. “Umm... There were no problems. The road was as clear as it usually is.” He managed to keep his cool, doing his best not to seem suspicious.

“Good, the patrols seem to be doing their job for once then.” The room had eventually grown darker and darker while they were conversing as the sun finally disappeared from the sky. Crickets had come out to play, and their chirps could be heard. Lacking any form of cheap and convenient lighting, the rural folk of Gemeinplatz had no choice but to go to sleep at night. Shinasi Sr. tapped Shinasi Jr.’s shoulder to get his attention. “Son, get the bedding out for the guests. You don’t plan on letting them sleep on the floor now, do you?”

“Of course not.” With the father’s command, it was clear that it was time for the day to conclude. Everyone quickly sipped the remaining tea, and accommodations for Brown and Ayomide were set up on the entrance room. They were to rest on woolen futon-like bedding, which was much more comfortable compared to Libertycave’s luxury straw accommodations.

Thus the night would march on once more, eventually making way for day...

Chapter 48: Chapter XLV – Walk before me faithfully and be blameless.



28th of Summer, 5859
Yellowclover Village, Outskirts of the City of Casamonu

Having slept in caves, mud huts and the great outdoors, the simple wool bedding courtesy of Shinasi Sr. felt like the clouds of Heaven for everyone involved. Brown's back wasn't aching for the first time in three months, Ayomide didn't mutter a few curses while waking up and Shinasi... He hadn't managed to get sleep as he was too busy catching up with his family during the night. There wasn't much ado in a small village like this, most of the talk was either acquaintances getting married, dying from disease, or a new child being born. This standard fare provided a feeling of normality which had been lacking in Shinasi's life since he had joined an abolitionist group locked in the mountains. Of course, he didn't mention his new occupation to his family; Shinasi didn't want his father having a heart attack.

Signaling the beginning of this new day was the cry of a rooster, a shriek cry from the neighbor's errant rooster who loved to cry before the sun even rose up. Brown, in his newly awoken state, thought that he should hire this rooster to help fix the sleep schedules of everyone in Libertycave. Brown slowly got up from his bed, which woke up the neighboring Ayomide as well. She reluctantly raised her head to see that the sun hadn't even properly shown its face. Regardless of her desire to go back to sleep, Brown had already woken up. The old man wouldn't let anyone not be "healthy, wealthy and wise" if he could help it, the problem being that his standards for earliness were far too strict for the people of Gemeinplatz.

"Good morning, young lady. It is good to see that you have risen early."

"Yeah, yeah..." Ayomide could barely see Brown with her half-closed eyes. "Yawn. Are we going already?" *This bedding is too good to leave...*

"I hope you don't think of me as an idler." Brown graciously helped Ayomide by quickly lifting her sheet up. No option was left for Ayomide but to wake up now. The old man had won the battle for

sleep once more, on two fronts. First, he had woken up Ayomide. Secondly, the commotion created by waking her up had caused Shinasi to wake up. He made his presence known by peeking through the door to the only other room in the house.

“Old man...” Shinasi’s hair was messy. Some may think that he had a case of bedhead, but his usual hairstyle looked indistinguishable from bedhead with spikes of hair extending in all four cardinal directions simultaneously. “...for the love of what you call hallow, the sun’s barely up!”

“The Devil does not sleep, young man.” Brown had already worn his coat and knapsack. He was ready to march on. “Neither should we if we wish to keep up with his countless machinations.”

“Old man, I’ve seen a couple devils in the dungeons.” Shinasi was getting ready to go out despite readying a comeback. “They do sleep.” After getting his gear ready he splashed some water on to his face from a water basin. He shuddered as the water had gone cold during the night.

“Jacob slept plenty as well. Neither was that living sack of rotting taters clever enough to make any machinations.” Ayomide joined in washing her face, going further beyond by also cleaning grime off her hands with Brown-made slime soap. “I think you don’t need to be concerned of devils.”

Brown didn’t exactly want to mention the name of Satan any further, so he avoided evangelizing about this topic any further. The only bad thing about leaving early was that he was unable to say farewell to his hosts. He left a few bars of soap (that he had been carrying around in case of emergencies) on the table as a gift of gratitude.

“Are you all ready to go?” Ayomide and Shinasi both nodded in response. “Then, may our Heavenly Father protect us, let us set off!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

28th of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, County of Casamonu

Casamonu. A grand and ancient city, established several millennia ago before the Empire of Gemeinplatz had ever been born. The city itself is surrounded by ruins of other Casamonus who have failed to survive the test of time not to mention the invisible ruins which have been buried under the earth long ago. No matter who has built or ruled it over the long years, one thing that has never changed about Casamonu is caravans filled with copper passing its gates to conduct business with craftsmen in the city. Such important gates require excellent protection, and excellent protection requires experienced guards.

Unfortunately, experienced guards require money. Money that the county couldn’t afford to spare for some men to stand around all day checking a gate.

“So, what’re you doing this weekend?” Billy (whose real name was Bilaleddin) was the quintessential guard recruit. A simple helmet, an even simpler sword, and the simplest wooden shield known to man were all that protected him. Like all his comrades he wore a bright yellow vest with the words “Casamonu Customs” written in several languages. All who joined the guard had to provide all this equipment themselves. The pay was mediocre but the job was easy enough that people did invest in equipment to join the gate guard.

“This weekend? I take it that you haven’t been here for long?” Bob (whose real name was Boron) was the quintessential guard veteran. A simple helmet, an even simpler sword, and the simplest

wooden shield known to man were all that protected him just like his green comrade-in-arms standing next to him.

“What do you mean?” As far as Billy knew they were supposed to have one day of vacation.

“Don’t you know the life expectancy of a guard here?”

“No. How long is it?”

“I’d reckon it to be about thirty seconds.”

Billy was shaken and stirred. “Thirty seconds? They didn’t tell that to me when I signed up!” He looked at his measly armor and armaments. It was truly a sorry sight for poor Billy. He watched as the line waiting to go through the gate went forwards. Clad in full plate armor colored deep black, carrying an equally black zweihander, was an adventurer who terrified Billy. The black knight seemed to be the sort who’d cut him down then and there.

“Papers please.” The man in black obliged as he handed his papers over to Bob. A portly woman next to the black knight whose witch hat which seemed to reach for the heavens with its height did the same as well. Bob smiled at the black knight while handing the papers back. “Sorry for the delay honorable sir.”

Billy breathed a sigh of relief when the edgy knight left his sight. “Phew. I thought that my 30 seconds were up...”

“Huh? You took my words seriously?” Bob’s boisterous laugh echoed throughout the entirety of Casamonu. He patted the back of the recruit, trying to regain his breath. “I was just joking, boy. The job at the gate is the most secure job you can get as a guard in any city.”

“I-Is that so?”

“Yes. There are no monsters near the city, you know. Some poor sods get assigned to the watchtowers in the outskirts where they get napped by the weaponnappers.” Bob couldn’t help but laugh again, there wasn’t actually anything *that* funny about the situation but he was desperate for some fun having stood on the same spot for the last twenty years. “Count yourself lucky, boy. Most people that pass here are the respectable sort, like the Sir Black Knight you just saw enter.”

“Understood, sir.”

Bob had been simultaneously checking the papers of everyone while conversing. Thankfully there was no caravans passing by at that moment, which meant he didn’t need to pause to check their goods. He was so good at his job that people would understand that they needed to hand papers the moment his gaze landed upon them. They’d also pay the appropriate toll without complaint, which was mostly thanks to Bob’s bulky and intimidating build. Had there been LitRPG mechanics in Gemeinplatz, Bob would have definitely become a level 99 customs officer.

Other than his ability to efficiently process papers, Bob had also gained another ability with his years of experience: the ability to efficiently sus people out. He claimed he could easily differentiate the ne’er-do-wells from the e’er-do-wells just from how they acted while approaching the gate. The veteran customs guard was always on guard, always vigilant while scanning every passerby.

Bob was still keeping his guard when an unnoticeable party appeared before him. An armed young man with unkempt hair, a tall old gentleman with a magnificent beard and a stout catgirl with ginger hair. The old man exuded an aura confidence that Bob liked, the adventurer seemed to be just doing his job and the catgirl's eyes were travelling between them all in a nervous fashion. Confidence was good: criminals weren't exactly going to be at ease while showing forged documents. The only outlier was the slave, who Bob concluded must have newly fallen into her unfortunate situation considering she hadn't adapted. The second thing Bob liked was that the adventurer handed him his identification (a bronze badge containing personal information) without him having to ask.

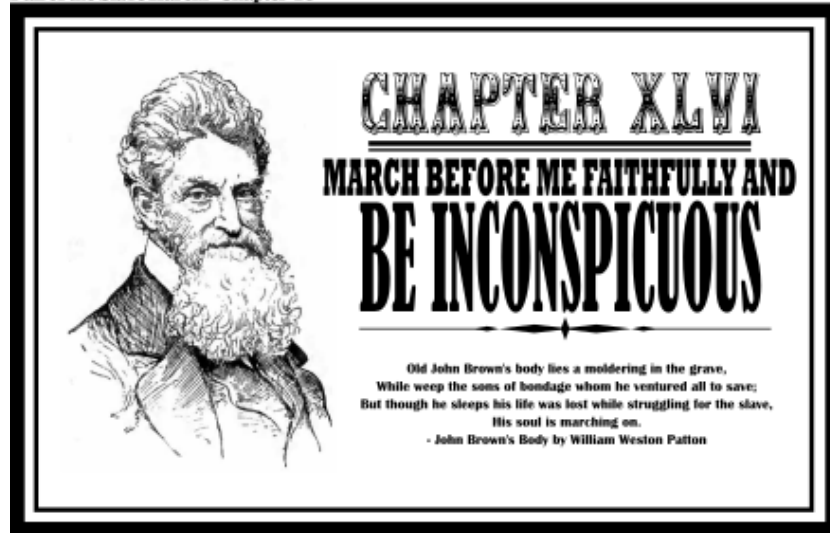
Bob quickly whizzed through the identification, one belonging to the Adventurer's Guild of Casamonu, as he had nothing to suspect about with the upstanding gentlemen who were standing in front of him. The guild would pay for the adventurer's toll, so he handed the badge without asking where his well-deserved toll was. Normally Bob would have to ask the old gentleman for identification as well, both for himself and what looked to be his slave, but he decided to not make the man pointlessly wait. He looked to be a good chap, a kind old man who had hired the young adventurer in front of him for protection... or so Bob made up a story for his guests as he tended to do.

Bob waved his hand towards the gate. "You may pass, sir." He let the group pass, immediately forgetting about them when the next group needed to be checked. Having seen thousands of faces, they all tended to blend together after a while for a veteran customs guard like him.

Like so Bob's and Billy's day marched on, without any trouble. They did their job perfectly, making sure that no one with malicious intent passed through the gates of Casamonu.

Chapter 49: Chapter XLVI – March before me faithfully and be inconspicuous.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 46



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

“...that’s why we went all the way around to the Southern gate?” Ayomide couldn’t help but look upwards to the ceiling while passing through the gate. The stone gate and the two-stories-tall wall that surrounded it looked quite impressive to say the least. She could see more guards watch them through slits in the ceiling.

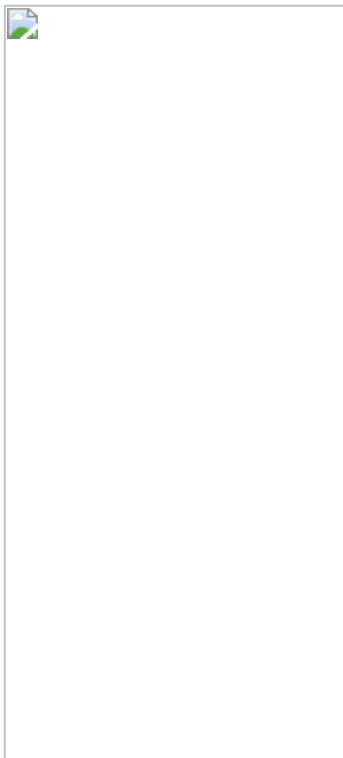


“Yes, Bobby is famous for being lax. Anyone in the know makes sure to go through him.” Shinasi looked back at Billy. “I was worried a bit when I saw his new assistant.”

Brown was walking alongside them, watching the walls in a similar fashion to Ayomide. He wasn't fascinated by the architecture however; old Brown was concerned with thinking about how he'd siege these down. A cannon could make short work of the walls. Brown thought of the copper mine in Mount Curry: with a bit of tin that copper could be turned into bronze and that bronze cast into a cannon. Then the issue came down to gunpowder, but the people of this world seemed to have already figured it out. It was likely that the natives of Gemeinplatz had already manufactured cannons as well. Perhaps Brown would need to be on the lookout for an engineer who knew how.



His thoughts of smashing the chains of slavery with 64-pounds of solid iron vengeance were briefly interrupted when the city of Casamonu came into view. Compared to Azdavay it was a grand settlement, for the standards of Gemeinplatz anyways, housing more than ten thousand people inside its walls. For the first time Brown saw buildings that were taller than two floors, some adventurous architects having gone up to four floors.



The crowds of people travelling between these building was equally grand as well, with Brown having to constantly say “Excuse me.” while passing by passersby. The sun could barely manage to make its way amongst all the buildings. The tents and stalls of the countless shopkeepers were left in the cool shade which was a welcome change after having to travel all the way under the summer sun to Casamonu. All the colors that could be reasonably found on not-Earth were on display to tempt customers into parting ways with their precious money.

Brown approached on of these shops to take a look at the textiles, only to be rudely interrupted by Shinasi tapping his shoulders. “What is it, young man?”

“Old man, the customs guards would rob us blind if you tried to get these out of the city in their view.” There was a building in sight that had a sign with a bundle of cloth and a thin bottle drawn on it. “See that building? That’s the United Guild of Textile Manufacturers & Winemakers. They don’t like it when you try to export their stuff without permission. I’ve had my fair share of problems with them.” One didn’t need to guess what Shinasi had difficulties exporting out of the city.

Brown looked quite displeased. “Why didn’t you tell me this sooner, young man?” The economy of Gemeinplatz seemed way too protectionist for a man who came from the United States of America.

“Oh, don’t you worry.” Shinasi looked quite relaxed compared to Brown. “A good adventurer has his ways. Follow me.” He led his party out of the crowded market square. Shinasi marched a fair way inside the city before he slipped inside a deserted backstreet which the sun had forsaken. Brown and co had to march in single file formation, the street being as small as a slave’s quarters. Shinasi went down a small set of stairs going down from the road, where an inconspicuous door lay. He knocked on it a few times, leaning toward the door and shouting out “Oh the grand city of Ancoire, whine not! Your day hath come”.

The backstreet looked like it’d have no living souls in it, but to the surprise of Brown there was a reply that echoed from the other side of the door. “Shall we make amends for when the day comes?”

“You needn’t make any amends for thine sins hath already been forgiven by the One above.”

With Shinasi’s enigmatic reply the door opened an equally enigmatic figure who immediately shut the door, leaving only a small slit for their voice to be heard. “Didn’t I tell you *not* to bring friends?!”

“Come on Ayda, they’re going to be your clients.” Shinasi tried to ply the door open with his spear to no avail. “Is this how you treat an old friend bringing you customers?”

“Customers?” The door slipped open a tiny little bit. “You aren’t tricking me, are you? Because the last time you came in with a bunch of ‘customers’, and all you did with them was party around and trash the place.”

“Young man, that is not okay.”

“You can berate me later, old man! Ahem, no, these are actual customers.” Shinasi’s spear suddenly slipped from his hand when the door suddenly opened. He’d have actually hit the woman behind the door if not for the woman grabbing hold of the spear with her bare hands.

“Be careful.” Ayda pushed the spear away, almost knocking down Shinasi in the process. “You should use a crowbar if you want to pry open doors. The penalty for murder is much greater than that of thievery, so try not to kill people.” She was quite the tall woman, standing at equal height to John Brown. Her arms had enough muscle to repel a dozen spears if need be, making her stand out as an intimidating figure. The woman’s pure black hair, in a spiky and messed up fashion all too similar to Shinasi’s, flowed down to meet her pure black eyepatch, her only functioning eye scanning the old man and the catgirl. “Good. You were going to leave with a few broken bones if you came here to party with your friends again.”

John Brown (currently travelling under the pseudonym of Isaac Smith) and Ayomide briefly introduced themselves to the woman. She didn’t care to introduce herself, only going inside into her shop. Shinasi followed her inside, so did the others after him. The room inside was a dimly lit one with only a small window to the outside letting light in. It was filled with boxes and barrels of various shapes and sizes, all of them having labels (illegible to everyone in the group) of some sort on them. The walls of the room were cluttered with empty bookshelves of unknown purpose. “All of you, turn around.” Only Shinasi turned around with the first command. “Turn around I say!” The rest of the group followed with the second. They all heard shuffling sounds, before a sudden audible click.

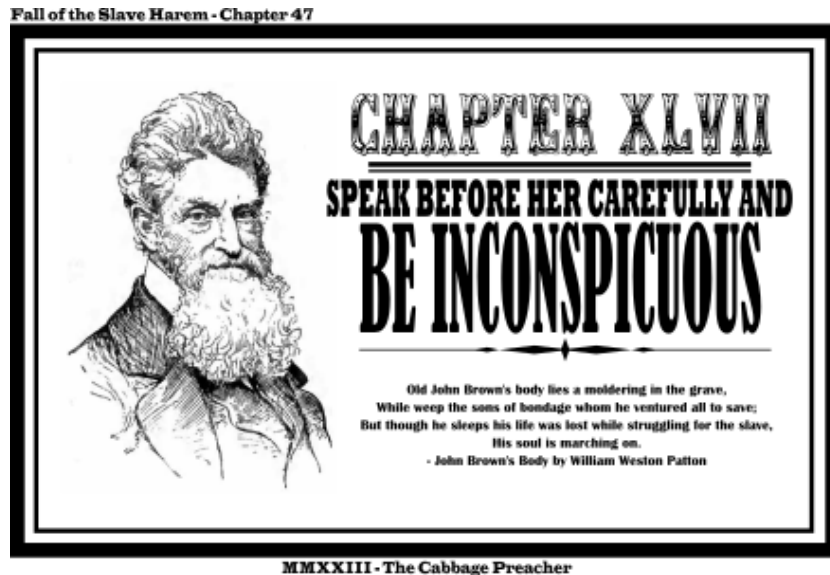
“Feel free to stop looking at the wall now.” Upon her command Brown and Ayomide turned back, unable to contain their curiosity. To their surprise they found that a spot in the floor had opened up, one that lead downwards to an even danker basement. “Follow me.” The only calm person in the group was Shinasi, who seemed to have done this a million times before, the others were looking around anxiously while they followed the woman into the dark basement. Another bout of shuffling began before an oil lamp attached to the ceiling lit up. There was no visible source for the fire except for a small blaze on the tip of Ayda’s hands.

The room was quite small as expected from the basement of such a cramped building. Half of it was occupied by a desk in the middle which had writing implements and tacks of papers on it full of text. The wooden walls had countless maps attached to it, all of them full of markings pointing to various locations. It was as shady as basements could get.

Ayda put the oil lamp on the desk, slowly and carefully to make sure it doesn’t go out. She sat on an armchair which stood out as the most expensive thing in the room. The woman made herself comfortable, leaning back and firmly planting her shoes on the desk.

“So, what’s your deal then?”

Chapter 50: Chapter XLVII – Speak before her carefully and be inconspicuous.



Brown wasn't a stranger to conducting shady business; the Beecher's Bibles didn't ship themselves. The laws of men, like tariffs, were below the laws of the Lord, like abolition. Judging from all the maps in the room, and what had prompted Shinasi to bring him here, Brown had a guess as to what this place might be. "Is this something like a smuggler's den?"

"No, we're a charity taking care of stray kittens. We sometimes invite Shinasi to hold fundraiser parties." answered the woman. This obviously sarcastic remark, delivered in such a dry manner that sucked all the humor out of it, prompted yet another moment of awkward silence. The woman took her shoes off the table and leaned in to have a closer look at her clients. "Of course this is a smuggling den! Why are you people here if you don't even know that? Bloody hell..." She took hold of a quill and a clean sheet of paper to write on while adding on more complaints under her breath. "So, what do you need? We've got it all as long as you have the coin, especially booze. A new shipment just came in from Ancoire, and we're having a flash sale." Ayda had quickly calmed down and assumed the demeanor of a good businesswoman.

Shinasi was about to inquire about the booze, but Brown quickly interrupted him before he could throw away their money. "We're looking not for luxury, but for basic items. Wool, cloth, any good textiles you might have."

The woman began quickly jotted down some words on to her paper. "I see, been a while since we've had merchants coming around to visit us." she said, not bothering to look up from the paper. The purpose of Brown's request, or anything else didn't interest her at all, the only thing that interested Ayda was one thing. "She extended her hand forward, with an open palm. "How much are we talking about?" Her hands were met with a great weight, the weight belonging to a sizable sack of coins. "Oh?" Ayda quickly opened the sack, the light reflecting off of the coins lighting her face. The businesswoman counted all the coins in a brisk pace, every libra lightening up her face. She bit on a few of them, put some on a scale, and even threw the coins on the table to listen them jingle and confirm that they were real. "Mister Brown, I think I'm beginning to like you." Her respect for him had grown as large as the sack of money. She added a few numbers next to the

items she had previously noted. “It’ll take a day... or two to fulfill your request.” She took out a small slip of paper, and wrote down a few things on it before handing it to Brown. “Do not lose this or let any filthy guards get their hands on this. I won’t be getting in trouble if *that* happens, but you will.” She extended her hand towards Brown, intending to seal the deal officially. “My agents will find you when the time is right. Do not leave Casamonu under any circumstances.”

Brown accepted Ayda’s offer of shaking hands. Her grip was tight, and the old man could hear his bones protest during their brief shake. He definitely disapproved of her uncouth tongue, and her general unchristian behavior, but Brown held his tongue for now. “I pray that our relationship proves to be fruitful Miss Ayda.”

Ayda smiled, her one eye on the money which had been left on her counter. “I feel that it has been more than fruitful already.” She opened the hatch back to the ground floor and put out the oil lamp. “Farewell now, it is better for us to not stay here for too long.” She led them out the room, and graciously opened the door out herself only to find another guest outside. “Oh?” It was someone wearing full plate armor, conspicuously painted full black. “Mister Kim, what a pleasure it is to see you once more.”

“My name is not that! You’re to call me Sir Schwarz von Limburg-Liechtenstein when I’m armored.” He tried to pass the door, but was blocked by Brown and co. Both parties shuffled around for a few seconds before they were able to find a suitable arrangement and pass by each other.

Shinasi looked back at the building with jealousy. “That guy must be rich with all that armor.” He’d have loved to be armored like an armadillo, alas, all he had was a shield which was the bare minimum for a tank.

“Eh, all you have to do is push him into a river. Or a swamp. Or use light magic right in his helmet so he goes blind, falls, and is unable to get up...” Ayomide listed a few more ways to brutally kill of an armored tank, which it didn’t please Shinasi to have so much vitriol thrown towards his class. “Heavier the armor, quicker the fall I’d say.”

Brown was leading them to back to the square, where he planned to fight accommodations for the night before planning anything further. “Hmm... I believe that could make quite the good analogy.” Brown loved a good analogy, especially if it was biblical. He marched onwards, his mind occupied with allegories and aphorisms.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

28th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

The Devil doesn’t sleep, neither does Harriet Tubman in her quest to avert his machinations.

Brown going on a quest didn’t mean that the entirety of Libertycave had stopped working, on the contrary they were working harder than before thanks to their improved quality of life. Everyone had a mud hut for themselves, the ransomed tools certainly helped and Baha’s copperworkers invented novel solutions for anything that was missing. Like their newly made copper bowls, affectionately nicknamed the “Mark 1 bowl” or “M1”, which doubled as helmets when turned upside down. Or the new “spoonforkknife”, which was a spoon, fork and a knife all-in-one utensil which eliminated the need to forge separate cutlery. It was a stubby little device, with a bowl (like a

spoon), tines on aforementioned bowl (like a fork) and a sharp edge on the sides (like a knife). What'd be made impossible by byzantine system of guild-imposed regulations or the whip of an overseer had become possible under the free and fresh air of Mount Curry.

All that progress would be for naught however, if they weren't marching on in a forward fashion in their quest for abolition. Compared to the more fire-and-brimstone Brown, Tubman was more the type to be more cautious and take things slowly. Not out of any lack of zealotry, she had more than enough of that and she approved of Brown's actions, but more out of a desire to not be shot dead by the U.S. Marines while leading people to safety. A dead Tubman was a sleeping Tubman, and who's to keep the Devil in check then?

Kyauta entered Tubman's "office", currently a small hut right outside the cave of Libertycave. "Miss Tubman, our team just returned from the farms to the north. Most of those seem to be populated by the peasantry." Unlike what one might expect from an office, there was no paper or ink to be found, only a copy of the map Brown had found in the Algernon estate. Tubman was illiterate, so was the rest of her men, not that she needed letters to do her job. What was she going to do, send a strongly worded letter to the Emperor and ask him kindly to stop enslaving her people?

"Nothing interesting." She crossed off some of the locations to the north on the map with a piece of charcoal. "Those slavers seem to be mostly working sugar beets and tobacco." It made sense for the slaves to be working cash crops. Less cash (or no cash) paid to workers meant more cash for the boss, the only caveat being that this meant there'd be abolitionists in the local area dying to meet you. What's worse was, no matter how hot they were, hot singles in your local area couldn't burn down your house; abolitionists in your local area could and *would*.

"Then, should we go about like we did in Azdavay?" Kyauta seemed more than ready for action. Her knife was always strapped to her belt, and she never took off the gambeson. The Lord liked those who were vigilant, or so she had heard from Tubman.

"No, no. It's not time yet for another full-on uprising Miss Kyauta. Let our oppressors think that they're safe." She rose up from her chair, her old bones creaking under the pressure. She took her staff, one that was mainly used as a cane and an oratory tool. "I hear the voice of the Lord last night, in all His endless glory."

"What'd that be, Miss Tubman?" Kyauta approached closer to the old abolitionist to hear her more clearly. Her visions hadn't failed them back in Azdavay, or when Tubman first found Kyauta, so her trust was utmost.

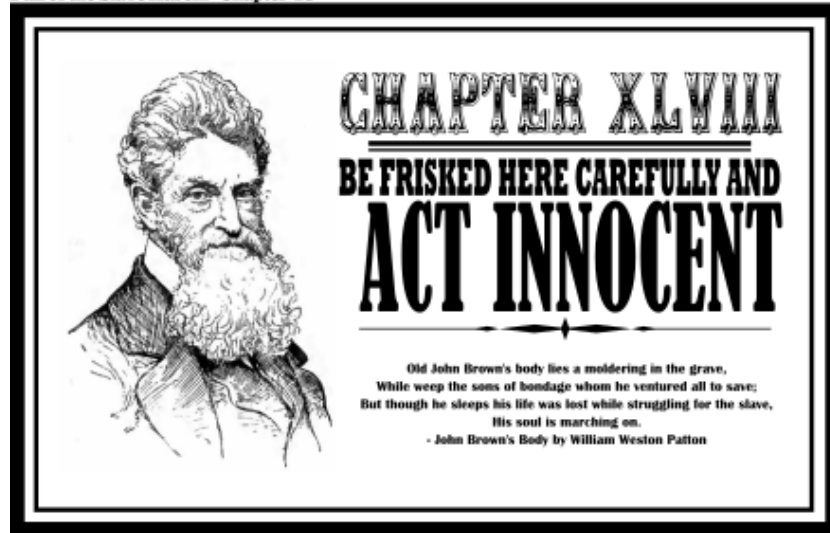
"He told me that we should not grow compliant, that our achievements are great but we are growing too proud." She looked out from the hut, to the small village that had been formed. Everything looked fine, for now. "That we were but a small flock, a flock remaining still while wolves circle in around us. Idleness, sloth, it is a great sin, and the Lord won't have it!" She slammed the ground with her cane fiercely. It was surprising how much life the old woman had in her. "The Lord told me, that we must make His flock larger and our grazing grounds wider!"

"Erm..." Kyauta wasn't sure what to think. She honestly hoped that God, in His infinite wisdom, would be less cryptic especially to someone who didn't know a lot about shepherds. She had been the personal bodyguard of a noble way back home before she was captured and sold into slavery, and her life had involved combat even after that. Pastoral life was as much of a stranger to Kyauta as freedom was.

Tubman seemed raring to go; it was as if she had suddenly gotten thirty years younger. Her staff shook the earth with her every step, signaling to the world that Harriet Tubman was arriving in all her glory. “Come, let us go. We must do the work that our Lord has given us.”

Chapter 51: Chapter XLVIII – Be frisked here carefully and act innocent.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 48



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

28-29th of Summer, 5859

Adventurer's Guild of Casamonu, Casamonu (where else would it be?)

Up on the second floor of the adventurer's guild building, Brown and co. had lodged themselves firmly in the cheapest straw bedding imaginable to man. The "Adventurer's Guild" wasn't an all-encompassing international institution like it is in other otherworlds, instead being independent organizations regulating (or throttling) business like any other guild. This meant that quality varied greatly between Adventurer Guild to Adventurer Guild, and one even had to pay for multiple membership fees at once if they thought about working in different cities like Shinasi had done for Azdavay and Casamonu. One could only wonder what Adam Smith would end up writing if he was isekai'd into Gemeinplatz.

Straw, as one might be able to guess, was not the most comfortable of all beddings. It makes you scratch, it makes you itch, and you have to be careful not to wake up with a piece of straw making its way deep into your precious nose. Every move you make makes the countless pieces crunch and rustle, making for unbearable noise when you have twenty people lined up in the same cramped room. Not to mention the smell of twenty unwashed adventurers... Even worse, this was accommodation for freemen. Most adventurers fortunate enough to own a slave of course didn't want to pay for the slave's bedding, and the straw in the guild's stables was free to rest on for members. The stables added a lovely layer of "horse dung" on top of things which definitely didn't help improve the experience for most.

Thankfully, for Ayomide, her being a slave was just for disguising purposes. Brown had been met with a few protesting voices when he had brought a darkskin to the "first-class" section of the guild, but they died down when Shinasi made some excuse about "Sir Smith" needing to attend an important meeting soon and not wanting his slave to smell alongside him. Still, Ayomide could swear a couple of the adventurers deliberately disposed of their unneeded trash items right next to her. Gritting her teeth, she exercised patience and sufficed by dreaming about beating a bunch of them to a bloody pulp while taking no prisoners; actually taking no shit and beating everyone who

threw an insult your way was a luxury reserved those who were privileged enough to not be lynched for it.

The night marched on and then off, all visitors in the guest room having a fun time turning and tumbling around the straw. No matter how much he tried, Brown couldn't find a position which wouldn't result in his back aching as if the Devil had come to personally torture him. Him waking up was as torturous as well, before the sun had barely risen the guild's guest room had surprise visitors who woke everyone up. A trio of people ran up to the stairs, causing quite a ruckus before entering the room itself. "This way, the adventurers rest here." They were led by a nervous guild receptionist with a clipboard on his hand. He was flanked by two guards with the distinct bright yellow of the count's customs officers.

Before any of the adventurers could wake up and react, the receptionist began reading names from his clipboard. "Dikla the Tall of Azdavay, Ermen of Gödel, Miray of Karash..." She pointed at the owners of these names as they were read. The guards approached anyone pointed towards, quickly shaking them down while clearly searching for something. "...Parvin the Shrewd of Subash, Shinasi of Azdavay son of Shinasi of Azdavay..." Shinasi's pockets were quickly patted down as well, the guards finding nothing but spare change. After all the adventurers were counted for, ignoring the non-adventurer guests like Brown and Ayomide, the guards conducted a shakedown of the room by searching for whatever in the haystacks. Clearly dissatisfied by not finding anything, they left the room as eagerly as they had entered it. Some of the adventurer's reluctantly stood up from their beds, while some tried to go back to sleep as if nothing had happened.

"...Alright, what was *that*?" asked Shinasi while quickly pocketing his spare change which had been dropped onto the floor. Most annoyingly, two small coins from his pocket seemed to have gone missing in the hay. Seeing that he received no answers from the audience, Shinasi targeted someone amongst the audience who seemed sort of familiar. "Dikla? You're... my eldest cousin's second husband's younger brother, if I remember correctly." The brain of an average villager was usually filled to the brim with very distant relatives they saw everyday but barely cared about except for when they needed a favor. "Could you mind enlightening me?"

"Ah! We do know each other, don't we! I sort of thought you were familiar, what a coincidence!" Dikla added a couple words which were cliché in a meeting between people who were barely related to each other. He searched the floorboards of the room, taking out a loose plank and lifting it up. Lo and behold, he had a very familiar sort of small paper. "I think you know what it is, I'm sure you couldn't afford your famous winesoppery without some help." He cooled himself down by flapping the paper like a fan. "Of course, I do something more productive by running a side hustle instead."

"Yes, I think every adventurer worth their salts knows what's up with that. I was wishing to be enlightened on the sudden visit by the yellow-vests." *I guess he just wanted to brag about his side hustle...* Shinasi remembered why he didn't like talking with far off relatives. He was essentially a stranger to his eldest cousin's second husband's younger brother, yet there was also a certain level of intimacy expected from talking with a blood relative which made conversation feel forced and awkward.

"Oh, the yellow-vests?" Dikla furrowed his brows at the thought of those pesky guards trying to stop his grind. "Someone must have croaked to them. Like, bloody hell, it's supposed to be an open secret between adventurers, not a secret open to everyone!" The man looked even more annoyed at the thought. "Can't a guy just do some small-time trading on his way to adventure, running fabric between cities without a bunch of 'stand-up' gits trying to ruin his job?!" He would have loved to

kvetch further if not for a sleepy adventurer in the room shouting at him to shut up. Dikla had to lower his voice much to his own annoyance. “Just be careful out there. You never know when the yellow-vests come knocking.”

“We’ll be careful.” Shinasi jumped back into the hay, he still had some sleep to do. He turned to the old man while on the “bed”. “Old man, make sure to hide the paper somewhere safe.”

“Don’t worry young man, an old man of action like me has his tricks.” Brown inserted his hand to his magnificent beard, soon taking out the small slip which had been rolled up to fit. “I don’t think anyone is going to inspect an old man’s beard.” He put the slip back in, and laid his head on the hay once more. Even John Brown wasn’t going to wake up *this* early, God forbid.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

29th of Summer, 5859

A tobacco plantation (name as-of-yet unknown), Outskirts of Casamonu

The morning sun was slowly rising over Casamonu, slowly bringing light to its flatlands. The rolling green hills with Mount Curry looking over them in the distance, the green grass swaying under the wind and the cool breeze... It was quite the comfortable environment, the perfect one for a picnic, or a scouting mission.

Kyauta was sat on a hill overlooking a nearby plantation. The novice abolitionist was scanning the area through her hands which she had bent to a shape resembling binoculars. She could see fields of green tobacco plants along with newly harvested leaves being dried under the sun. “Miss Tubman.” she said, noticing what they had been looking for. “The overseers are coming out to play. You reckon we’ll...”

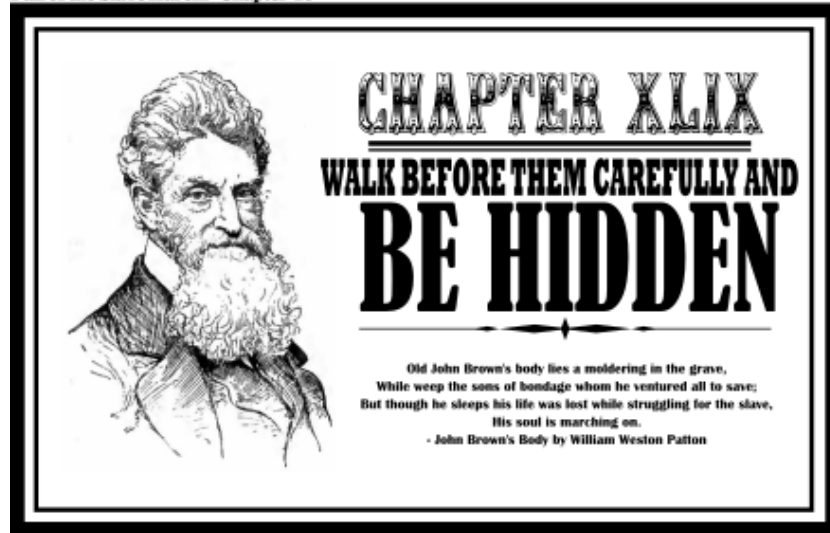
“Have time to skedaddle?” Tubman rose up from her seated position. Her old legs had been tired during her round of overlooking. “They should have come out a few hours ago if they didn’t want to give us time to skedaddle. We’ll have time to reach Gilead and cook a nice dinner while they’re still having sweet dreams.” She took a look towards the plantation herself. “What’d you think’s the best food for the new arrivals? I think that Mister Hakim would love to bake some cake with the new batch of pearl ash he cooked up.” Tubman picked up her axe she had left lodged in the ground, an axe brought along just in case of abolitionist emergencies. “Let’s go. We’ll go in tonight.”

“To-Tonight?!” Kyauta stopped looking at the plantation to look at Tubman. “Don’t we need to... I don’t know, prepare?” She didn’t know what exactly they needed to prepare, but Kyauta had reservations about risking her life once more.

Tubman was already making her way towards a spot she intended to camp on. “Every day that we prepare means more suffering for our brothers and sisters.” She swung her axe around as if it was a whip. “You see? With the Lord above watching and guiding us, we should be more than ready.”

Chapter 52: Chapter XLIX – Walk before them faithfully and be hidden.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 49



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

29th of Summer, 5859 Adventurer's Guild of Casamonu, Casamonu

“Mmh... Is it morning or not?” Morning had come, and the sun wasn’t shining on anyone’s faces. Not out of any weather-related or supernatural reasons, but out of the fact that the adventurer’s guild in Casamonu had bricked up its windows. Glass was expensive, and a “window tax” had been implemented pretty recently by the count making having needless windows a bother for businesses. The upper classes would just pay the count off to continue having their precious windows, while the rural nobility was unaffected by the petty taxation concerns of the pesky city folk. Ayomide knew none of that, all she could do was try her best to understand how much she had slept by gauging how sleepy she felt at the moment.

Shinasi slowly rose up as well. He had woken up upon hearing Ayomide. “Who knows when they’ve removed the windows? Only one way to find out.” He got up on his own two feet and waited for Ayomide to do the same. “It seems the old man has already bailed.”

“Oh? Oh.” Ayomide looked around her to find that, indeed, there was no other radical abolitionists in her local area. “I did find it weird that no one woke me up. He’s probably gone out to take a walk or something.”

“You’re probably right.” Shinasi checked his pockets, finding a very dry piece of hardtack courtesy of Hakim. “Let’s just eat something downstairs. Maybe we’ll find him there.”

The pair went down the stairs, entering the wide hall of the Adventurer’s Guild of Casamonu. Unlike the disappointing guest room upstairs, the big city had a decent enough dining hall and reception area. The tables had been newly cleaned, a job that took a long time thanks to adventurers drinking away every night and leaving a mess behind them. There were windows on the ground floor, which meant that the precious morning sun could actually be seen newly rising up. The dining part was mostly abandoned this early in the morning, except for...

“...that’s why me like America, you know? You buy tank and ride legally; it is okay to do!” The black knight from gushing about the United States in broken English to a certain someone.

“...how do you ‘ride a tank’ young man? Tanks are meant to contain liquid, not passengers as far as I am aware.” John Brown was the target of this gushing, and it seemed that he wasn’t really managing it well.

“I was wondering how you could drive a tank as well.” said a woman wearing a very tall witch’s hat, so tall that one couldn’t forget it even if they saw it once.

“A tank...” The black knight went silent for a second. One couldn’t see whether he was thinking or not thanks to the helmet covering his face. “It’s like a golem on wheels. You ride it and go to battle.”

“Ah, I see.” The witch nodded, clearly satisfied by the answer.

“A golem... on wheels? Wouldn’t a golem have legs to move around?” All Brown vaguely knew of golems were that they were beings from Jewish folklore, humanoid creatures made out of mud or clay who followed orders without question. He was confused as to how or why someone would ride such a thing to battle.

“No, some of them don’t have legs. Most don’t actually, golems with legs are hard to balance.” replied the witch. “Wheels are much common in the ancient golems I’ve seen. Fierce things those are, you can barely pierce through their steel armor. Thankfully they’re also really dumb.”

“Dumb hunks of steel on wheels...” Brown had a eureka moment, remembering their surprise encounter in the supposedly ‘minor’ dungeon. “Do those steel ones appear in minor dungeons?”

“Of course not! There wouldn’t be anyone left alive in the guild if that was the case.” replied the witch. “If an old man like you sees one, the best thing you can do is run away and call us for help.”

The dark knight patted his precious zweihander which he had leaned against the wall. “Yes, we can take care of them. For a price, of course.” He was smiling at the end, though no one could see from the giant hunk of steel covering his head.

“Yes, this tin can can open all other tin cans, can’t he?” She gently knocked on the knight’s helmet, which caused him to feel as if his head was being pecked by a dozen woodpeckers.

“Tangerina! Didn’t I tell you not to do that?!” The black knight’s gaze moved towards an anachronously designed clock on the wall. “Come on, it’s time we go.” He got up, and extended his hands towards John Brown while speaking in English. *“I am glad meeting American who isn’t loser.”*

Brown was taken aback by how direct the man sounded, but he shook his hands out of formality nonetheless. “Have a nice day.” He intended to go back to staring out the window, contemplating the nature of God and existence and whatnot, until he noticed his party members watching him from afar. “Oh, good morning young lady and young man. I see you two are early.”

“Good morning old man, I see you’ve found a new conversation partner.” replied Shinasi, taking a seat in front of Brown. He took out his hardtack and began eating it for breakfast.

“No, they found me.” He began taking a look out the window, unable to resist Casamonu’s otherworldly sights. “The gentleman in black armor suddenly asked if I was American. I said yes, and he suddenly started gushing about it.” Brown looked bored and tired from the conversation he had. Not understanding half of anything that was said made it hard to derive any entertainment. “I do wonder how the 21st century is...” He wasn’t sure whether things had gone better or worse as far as what he knew from the rumors.

“We’re in the 59th century, old man. I think you’re wondering about the wrong time.” He took a bite out of his hardtack, joining Brown in navel-gazing. “I do wonder how I’m going to be by the time the 60th century arrives.”

“You’re gonna be the old man by then.” replied Ayomide. Truth be told, she hadn’t gotten enough time to think of the future, not to mention not having had a future to think of to begin with. Would she, or, would they be still alive by then? Unlike Brown, she was young, young enough to have a timespan of a couple decades to think about in terms of a future.

They all sat silently, unsure of what to do next. There wasn’t much for them to engage in while waiting for the okay signal to come from the smugglers. Brown tapped his fingers on the desk, Shinasi whistled a tune, and Ayomide stomped her foot...

“Ayomide!” shouted Shinasi suddenly.

“Wha?!” The catgirl jumped back from the sudden noise; Brown was too deep into religious contemplation to notice the noise. She looked around her, not seeing anything urgent that warranted Shinasi’s sudden exclamation. “What’s the sudden shout for?!”

Shinasi’s stopped, having lost a bit of courage after Ayomide’s reaction. Still, he had just slaid a golem, and the young adventurer was filled with enough courage to continue after a pause. “Wo- Would you like to go out and eat something together while we wait?!”

“Yes! Why are you shouting?!”

“Why are *we* shouting?!” Shinasi coughed after having strained his vocal cords so much. They had both gotten a bit nervous to say the least, and Brown was looking at them with confused eyes after having missed the first part of their conversation / shouting match.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

29th of Summer, 5859
Rogers’ Plantation, Outskirts of Casamonu

Night had fallen upon Gemeinplatz once more, and the grueling work of harvesting and processing tobacco was done for the day. Most slaves sleeping in the slave quarters loved the night as it forced their masters to give them a break; no sane person could expect work during nighttime barring expensive lighting options. This was true for the slaves living in the plantation of one Sir Rogers, who were on the only true break from work they got for the entire day. Yesterday was work, today was even more work, and tomorrow would be a whole lot more work until they inevitably perished.

One slave amongst the countless was slowly dragging his feet back to the quarters, intending to be the last one to go in. The quarters indoors were cramped and stunk like how one would expect a

cramped room filled with twenty people to stink. He'd go back as slowly as possible to take in the fresh air before an overseer would rush him along.

Fresh and free air, there was plenty of it to be had outside the plantation. It wouldn't actually be that hard to escape outside the plantation, especially at nighttime. He thought of doing it countless times, but just escaping outside didn't mean you were free. There was a hostile world out there, most escapees would be found and sent back in a week or two if they were lucky, and the punishments for fugitives were the type to be not spoken of openly. Reaching Zon'guldac was a dream held by everyone, but only the naïve tried to realize their dream only to end up dead in a wild ditch or hunted down by adventurers. He again thought of bashing a careless overseer, the only one in his sight, and making a run for it. Thought was the only thing one could give to such a thing. He turned back, making his way back to the slave quarters as to not be punished.

"Hey brother, got a light?" He turned around at the sudden female voice behind him. It was a woman clad fully in black, and the overseer from before was nowhere to be seen.

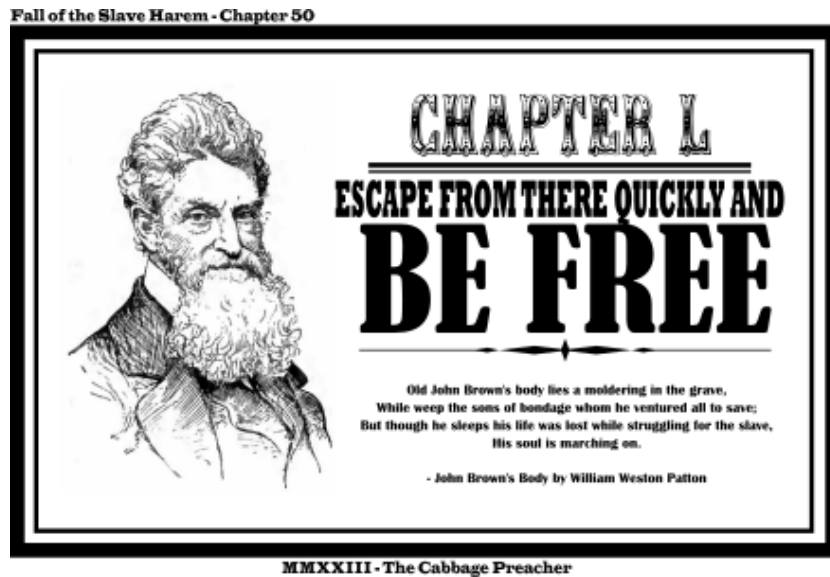
"N-No..." He paused, unsure whether to comply with this stranger. "But the kitchen should help you if you're looking for light." There was no harm in helping the woman whatever she was doing.

"Good. Go back to your quarters and inform your brothers and sisters to be ready. You probably won't need this, but..." She took out a small spear from under her cloak and handed it to him "Hold off any unexpected visitors."

"Huh, wha-" The woman quickly leaped back into the shadows before he could question anything. "There she goes..."

He was grateful for having paused to take a whiff of fresh air.

Chapter 53: Chapter L – Escape from there quickly and be free.



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

29th of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, Casamonu (Casamonu)

It was approaching night, and Shinasi had one huge wrench stuck into the works of his plan to go on a dinner date with Ayomide:

“No sir, we don’t allow darkskins here.”

“No slaves.”

“Get yourself and your dirty, stinky dark whore out of here!”

Reactions were mixed to say the least, but most places didn’t deign themselves to accept Ayomide. Not taking in potential customers was bad for business, sure, but taking in a catgirl? That’d probably drive away a whole lot more customers, and nobody wants to drive away customers. Shinasi and Ayomide circled around Casamonu once more, but they got the same response.

“I should’ve just stayed in the guild and not made us go through all that trouble...” grumbled Shinasi, finding himself a clean-enough spot next to the pavement. Walking around so much had tired them, especially when they hadn’t gotten to eat anything. “I’m so sorry.”

Ayomide sat on a spot next to him, watching the pedestrians pass by. Most of them took a look at her of course, catgirls weren’t that common, but that gaze of curiosity quickly turned to disgust when onlookers realized the dark shade of her skin. There were also the occasional gazes of lust, those felt even worse to be subject to. She couldn’t comfortably rest here. Ayomide quickly got back up. “Let’s just go back to the old man.” The young adventurer followed after her, beginning their way back to the adventurer’s guild building. He looked around him, seeing the passing crowd. The catgirl would most likely be dead if they didn’t think she was with him; harming private property was no go. The only thing keeping her alive was the threat of being fined by the state, which wasn’t the most pleasant of thoughts.

Brown was a naïve idiot, Ayomide thought, for considering the people of Gemeinplatz worthy of some sort of salvation. People in this city, people in all of Gemeinplatz, they were part of a crime worthy of summary execution according to her. That guy over there who just spat in front of her, the other one who had almost grabbed her behind, the lady just now who deliberately almost tripped her... *All of them, damn all of them to an early grave!* Ayomide had delved so deep into her thoughts that she hadn't processed the fact that she and Shinasi had stopped in front of a stall.

"Here you go." said Shinasi, handing over a freshly baked loaf of bread filled with molten cheese. "It isn't the sort of fine dining I'd normally treat a fine lady to, but we'll have to make do."

Ayomide stared at the piece of bread in her hand, then back at Shinasi. "Do you normally get to treat *any* ladies?"

"Oh, erm..." Shinasi took a bite out of his own loaf, chewing slow as he can to buy some time. Eventually he had to give an answer "I had a childhood friend from the village who I attempted to court when I was much younger, she... She rejected me by coating me in a bucketful of cow dung." He took another bite to drown out the memory. "Then there was my adventuring companion, Shakira, who flat out rejected me with the flat side of her giant sword." He took one more bite. "And there was Ayda, who called me a 'shield-bearing shrimp... *Ahem.*" Shinasi paused after having recounted his vibrant love life. He needed to urgently redirect the conversation somewhere else. "Come on, it's good, eat up."

Ayomide objected not to taking a bite, she was pretty hungry after all. She spoke while still chewing her food, an action shunned by polite society. "Mm... Consider yourself lucky to be rejected all those times, 'cause you got me in the end."

"Wait, wait!" Shinasi coughed a few times, almost having choked on his food. "That implies you aren't rejecting me."

Ayomide couldn't help but laugh in response to the man's statement. "What, you think I was here just to get free food? That was one of the reasons to be honest, I'll never say no to free food. It's not the primary reason however, I'd have taken a walk with you free food or not. I'm... happy to have spent the time with you, even if this time was just emptily wandering the streets."

Shinasi looked around him, seeing that they had managed to walk into a more deserted area of the city. *Good, no one to judge me if I do it right now.* He opened his arms, frozen in place like a scarecrow planted on a field.

"Uhm..." Ayomide looked at Shinasi's ridiculous posture, wondering what the man was trying to do. "Err... Are you expecting something?"

Shinasi nodded, but this didn't help Ayomide understand anything at all. He finally gave in, gathering his courage to break the silence. "I- I kind of hoped to embrace you, but I kind of lost the courage halfway through..." His arm was beginning to shake, both out of nervousness and out of being tired from his scarecrow posture. "...this is basically the furthest I've ever gotten..." *...with someone who I didn't have to pay the nunnery for,* he finished silently.

"Oh? I thought you were going insane or something." She opened her own arms as well, slowly approaching him. "Just beware that I've never done this before."

I'm pretty sure no one needs any experience to hug someo- "Puah! Ah, Ayo- Ayomideaargh! Be a bit gentler! Please!" He flailed around for his life before Ayomide released him. "Phew, I'm

alive...”

“Huh? Aren’t you supposed to embrace people *tightly*?”

“Tightly, yes, but not enough to kill them! Like this.” Shinasi wrapped his arms around Ayomide gently.

“Ooh, I get it now! I always wondered how people could stay calm when being embraced.” Ayomide wrapped her arms in response, causing Shinasi to preemptively wince in pain. Thankfully, her embrace was a whole lot gentler this time.

This pair deemed to be unholy by the Temple and society at large stayed a while in this warm embrace, out of view and out of mind.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

30th of Summer, 5859
Rogers’ Plantation, Outskirts of Casamonu

The night had gone and the sunlight had come out once more to reveal what had been hidden the night before in the plantation. What *was* hidden wasn’t all too pleasant to some people however.

“Sir, we just managed to put it out.”

The charred remains of a shack, still smoldering in its grave. Blackened remains of wood, earth, and corpses mixed together into one gruesome mix. Buckets of water rested near this pile, once having been filled by the water used to put out the fire. All in all, a sight that’s none too pleasant to experience for most people, especially when you’re the owner of the shack and the people who burnt down. “Do you know what happened?”

The overseer could only shake his head and shrug in response to Sir Rogers’ question. “We don’t know, sir. The shack seems to have caught fire in the middle of the night, and all the slaves seemed to have burnt under it. We heard their screams all night.”

“Shacks don’t usually do that, do they?” Mister Rogers seemed calm, but he was near breaking down on the inside. He was screwed like a screwdriver screwing a screw. “Tell Sir Kim that none of our deliveries will be coming through this month.” A plantation without slaves was a plantation without anyone working, and the loss of a slave also meant the loss of a very valuable financial asset. People weren’t very cheap to buy, nor were they quick to be trained in the ways of processing tobacco. This was basically the end for Rogers financially, even if he had yet to internalize it. He was too worried to notice that a few of his overseers had gone missing as well.

A few kilometers away from Rogers and his plantation were the supposedly dead slaves making their escape through the mountains, led by Harriet Tubman herself aided by Kyauta. The line of slaves following behind her had one question, “Madame, do you think they’ll find us?”

Harriet Tubman had one answer, “‘course not. They think you’re buried under the shack right now.”

“But won’t they notice that the bodies are lightskins?”

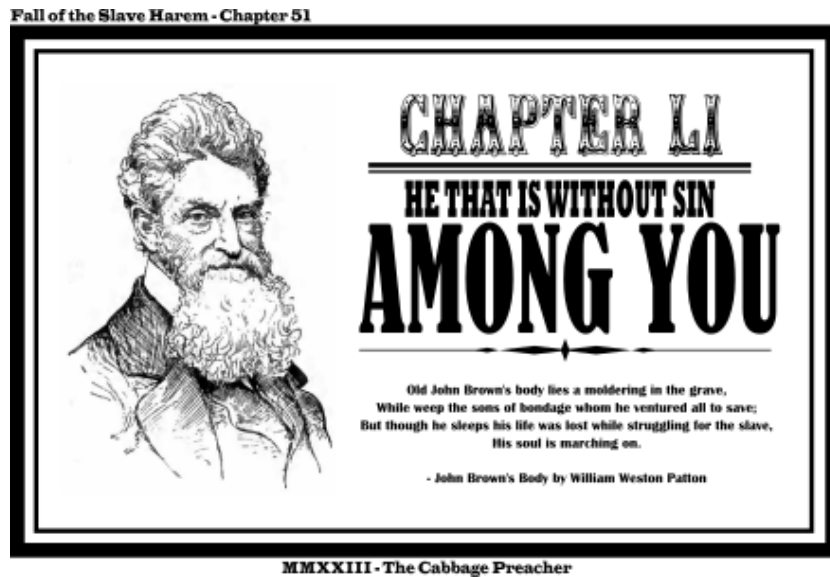
“The Lord makes us all equal in death, especially so if death involves being burned. Those folk should be looking like nothing but charcoal.” Tubman raised her voice to let the rest of the crowd hear her “From now on you’re all dead men according to the rest of the world. Do not think of returning to the plantation, I’ve seen some cowards attempt that before.” She then raised her axe to show it prominently “You won’t make it far if you attempt to go back, I assure you. Got that? I won’t be having mercy on anyone who runs back.” The fugitives were all silent, mostly due to being face-to-face with a woman carrying a large axe, but their slightly terrified faces made it clear that they understood. Some were worried that they may be being led to a place worse than the plantation, considering that the idea of a slave haven in the mountains sounded too good to be true. For all they knew, Harriet was just stealing them away to be worked in the copper mines.

The caravan of fugitives made their long-winded way up the mountain, the air getting colder and hopes dropping as they went higher up. Not much hope had been left by the time Harriet Tubman stopped on a nondescript plateau. “Here we are, welcome to Gilead.” She led the confused crowd, who were unable to see anything other than an empty plateau, until paradise arrived.

“Paradise” was a bunch of mud huts strewn around up on a cliff, but paradise it was for paradise is wherever one is free. Harriet lowered her axe at last, turning to address the crowd. “Brothers and sisters, you are now free. To stay here, to go somewhere else, or to fight. But you *are* free.”

The crowd cheered, and celebrated their long-lost freedom for the first time in their lives.

Chapter 54: Chapter LI – He that is without sin among you.



30th of Summer, 5859 Adventurer's Guild of Casamonu, Casamonu

Brown was emptily staring out the window of the adventurer's guild once more. The morning sun irritated his eyes, and he could barely see the small trickle of people going about their business. He was being idle and idleness irritated him more than the sun directly shining upon his face. Outside of the theological implications of not working, Brown was bored due to not having much to do in the city other than wait. He had planned for things to be simple, back in the US things would have been as simple as finding a willing seller and striking a deal with them. But no, the Lord had decided to tax and test him through tariffs and medieval economic BS, and what a test of patience it was! Ayomide and Shinasi had began fraternizing with each other rather than the old man, leaving him even lonelier. He wasn't much surprised to see the young'uns prefer each other rather than an old man, but still. Other than Harriet Tubman, the old man had no conversation partners who could understand him in any reasonable capacity.

"*Sigh...* O' Lord, please spare some of your grace and help us..." His staring-out-the-window session was briefly cut short by an inconspicuous figure stopping right outside the window. A normal-looking man, with ordinary white tunic and brown trousers with no discernable features. This man was standing right in front of where Brown was staring out of the window from, blocking the old man's sight. This foreign man leaned on the window, turning his back to Brown and the rest as if he had no interest in them while clasping his hands towards the back. To an outside this seemed to be the case, and Brown intended to shift around his seat to gain a view outside again. His shifting was interrupted when this ordinary man took out a small piece of paper, and clasped his hands to his back again with the paper stuck between the window and himself. It was positioned so that Brown's body blocked the paper from being seen by anyone indoors, the paper reading (in English) "ARE YOU I.S.? KNOCK IF YES".

I.S.? Was old J.B. an I.S.? The answer was yes, Isaac Smith was the name he had gone with when introducing himself to the folks here. He knocked on the window, and the man took out another paper, "FOLLOW". One thing that Brown had learned was that, if there was one thing that the

shady people of this world loved, it was communicating with paper. Perhaps there was some deep cultural reason behind it or, perhaps, Brown was too quick to judge shady people by the small group of shady folks he had experienced and not all of them used paper. It'd be unchristian of him to be generalizing people like that, so Brown decided to wait it out before he labelled every shady person in Gemeinplatz as a paper-user.

No matter what Brown thought of shady people, the shady people needed him to follow them, and his definitely non-shady comrades-in-arms needed to follow him in following them. His eyes followed a path towards Ayomide and Shinasi, who were busy following a long convo between themselves following their after-following up follow-up. "Young man and lady, the time has come."

"The time has come...?" replied Shinasi, before remembering why they were here in the first place. "Right, right, right." He got up, Ayomide following him in unseating herself. The young man knew of how the so-called Smuggler's Guild operated with their overly dramatic calls to follow one of their agents and whatnot. He'd have liked it better if they gave a time and place to meet like any courteous person would, not aware of the fact that even organized crime is called by that name because it's ran by an organization and not because organized crime is organized enough to work on a schedule. Some organized criminals were organized enough, sure, but these organized criminals were quite unorganized as was apparent. Perhaps they could use the help of an isekai'd mafia boss, though prospects of isekai'd mafia bosses were currently way outside what John Brown or anyone in his local area was thinking at the moment.

The trio made their way out the door of the adventurer's guild, finding themselves becoming passersby among a large crowd of passersby. "It's that person." whispered Brown to Ayomide and Shinasi, pointing to the man who had become even more inconspicuous as he blended into the masses. Both of them actually didn't get who Brown meant, so they had to suffice by following the old man following the shady man. They continued blending with the crowd for a while, not making any detours from the main road. Perhaps a hundred people passed by without awareness of the abolitionists among them. It felt quite nerve-wracking to be the abolitionists hiding in the crowd. Shinasi and Ayomide did their best to maintain a poker face as to not end up being executed, which'd be a less-than-agreeable event for them. Dying wasn't a nice thing. Neither was living too nice for them, but death was a luxury reserved for radical abolitionists who were radically misplaced by rhetorical-or-real alien space bats.

Eventually, as Shinasi expected, they diverged somewhere along the main road to the ever-present backstreets of the city. A turn to the right, another to the left, a hop forwards and a great leap backwards, all of that combined into a confusing mess of directions. Brown had done his best to keep track of where they were going, but he was eventually lost in the midst of this alien urban sprawl. Ayomide could swear they were walking in circles, and Shinasi was barely managing to keep his mental map correctly tracking their convoluted route. He had actually faltered somewhere along the way, meaning that his carefully constructed mental map was quite useless unbeknownst to him. The smugglers were clever enough to know that it was a good idea to not have any nosy customers poking into their locations. It'd be quite the trouble if, let's day, Shinasi was to talk to his eldest cousin's second husband's younger brother about having gone to [REDACTED] Street on [REDACTED] Avenue while drunk.

Backstreets turned into backerstreets and those became backeststreets as they ventured further and further into the veins of Casamonu. The buildings became so cramped that the sun no longer shone down, an indication of the less-than-light business which is conducted round these parts. Brown kept his hands close to his pockets to avoid being picked by the occasional child eyeing his material possessions. This dark part of town was also dark in another manner, being the only place where

one might see free people with skin darker than pasty white. Unaccepted into any proper jobs, these freemen would either perish or enter into a life of crime to live. Most chose the latter willingly; the rest would have to “choose” the former unwillingly. Perhaps being a bit too optimistic, Brown thought that maybe they could be recruited in the future, though he had also seen how reluctant urbanites were in giving up their lives in the city to throw away their lives outside the city. He couldn’t blame them at this point, Brown wouldn’t follow some stranger to his death either. Most sane people obviously wouldn’t.

Empty thoughts of throwing away lives for strangers aside, Brown and co. had reached an end which was seemingly as dead as Watanabe Generico. They all took a pause while the not-so-inconspicuous man stopped to make a series of very confusing moves. He stomped on the ground, several times in several different places, then pushed a few loose bricks in and out of the wall. Then he pulled in a hidden rope in the wall, stomped the ground a few more times, knocked on a nearby door and tapped the wooden window frame of another nearby building. Finally, after all of these seemingly meaningless moves, a door belonging to a house he hadn’t even approached opened. No one could tell which of these moves was actually instrumental in opening the door and which were meant to misguide onlookers. The man entered the newly opened door, Brown and co. followed him in. Further following in after Brown and co. were a group of lightly armed men who had been following them discretely to make sure nobody would try to hurt the guide.

As expected, the room wasn’t the most pleasant the enter. It was dank, cramped and dark, a combination of words which don’t go well when experienced together. Inside there were a couple more people, all sitting on stacks of various textiles. They all got up when their expected guests arrived, each taking a large load for themselves. Without any words being exchanged, these porters followed the really-not-inconspicuous man into yet another hidden trapdoor, this one hidden under a badly damaged rug. Down from the trapdoor was a cramped tunnel where everyone had to march single-file to fit. There was no light, so the porters went off of their training while Brown and co. had to follow them. This tunnel had various paths leading to God-knows-where, and one would probably get lost if they hadn’t been trained to navigate it. Stuffy, claustrophobic and full of unwashed men, the tunnel was quite the unpleasant experience to be had, one that was reminiscent of the slave quarters for Ayomide (the only significant difference being the gender of the unwashed people).

Like all tunnels, this tunnel had light at the end of it too... eventually. After solid hellish hour of transporting goods, they all saw a small point where sunlight barely reached the tunnel. The guide pushed a bunch of leaves and twigs aside to reveal that they had finally reached the surface. Brown and co. practically jumped out of the tunnel, breathing in the fresh summer air. They had been dropped into the middle of an opening in the forest, where an empty cart awaited them. Marching in line, the porters dropped the textiles into the cart one by one before they stopped to touch the grass and take a break.

“Go straight from here.” said the guide, speaking for the first time “See those markings on top of those trees? Follow them and you should come straight out to the main road.” Brown looked up to see that, as the guide said, there were big dots carved on top of the trees of the forest, all presumably leading outwards. They’d be only be properly visible from one side, which meant that following these markers from outside-to-inside would be very difficult if wanted to track back to the tunnel (which was also hidden behind a small group of bushes). Not to mention that one probably couldn’t navigate the tunnels without the guide, quite the problem for any customs guards wanting to clamp down on smugglers. “Goodbye, and we hope to conduct business with you again soon.” With this last comment, the guide gathered up the porters and entered the tunnel again.

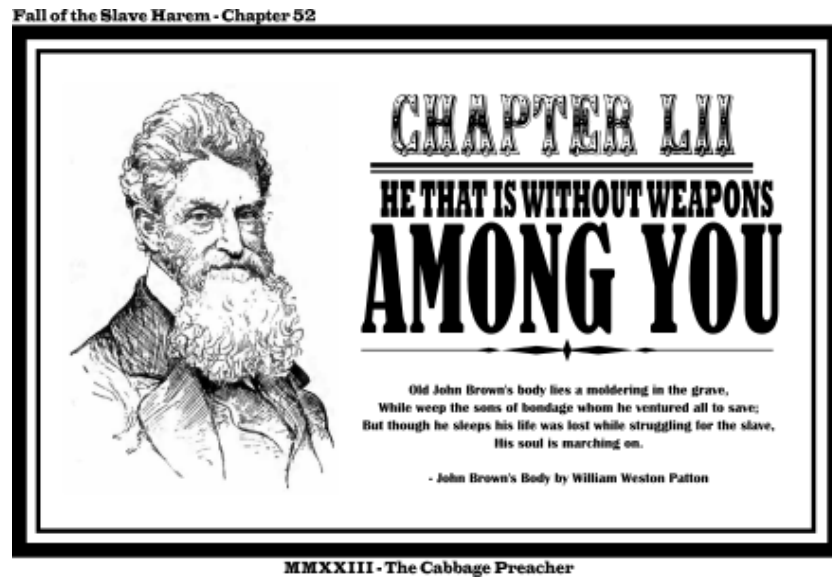
Brown and co. were alone once more, only the birds and the bees chirping and buzzing to accompany them. The leaves gently rustled as the wind blew by, the air was quite cool thanks to this grove being isolated, and there were armed men coming out of the woods.

“Wait, who are you?!” exclaimed Ayomide upon seeing their unexpected visitors. Brown and Shinasi got ready as well, as ready as they could be with their reduced combat gear. Shinasi carried his spear, Brown had his sword and Ayomide could only reasonably bring out a concealed knife.

“The boss wouldn’t allow us to get the catgirl.” replied a big chap, carrying around a club that was as large as himself. “We’re taking over this biz for ourselves. Please come along with us, miss. We wouldn’t want to damage any cargo.” He had ten more comrades with him, all looking equally ready to capture a valuable catgirl for themselves.

Things had gone too well, and it seemed that the Lord had intervened by sending them another challenge as was required for tension to be generated in the story.

Chapter 55: Chapter LII – He that is without weaponry among you.



In the depths of some nondescript forest in the middle of Northern Gemeinplatz, a trio of people were in trouble. Ranging from John Brown the 19th century radical abolitionist to Ayomide the 59th century magical catgirl abolitionist, theirs was quite the diverse group to be in trouble. Surrounded by eleven men who looked like what would happen if the unholy union between a generic low-level JRPG baddie and a generic WRPG bandit mob met and fell in love with the looters from a certain Strategy-RPG name involving mounts and blades. No matter their greatly disheveled and slovenly state, a group of eleven angry men was still a group of eleven angry men, one short of being twelve angry men but they were a bunch of angry men looking to judge the value of someone's life (in the slave market) nonetheless.

"Alright, alright, no need to lose your cool gentlemen." Ayomide dropped her dagger to the ground, while her comrades-in-arms watched her in shock.

Brown angrily whispered towards Ayomide, making sure the bandits weren't hearing her. "Young lady, you don't need to--"

"Be calm, trust in 'God's plan' or whatever, and both of you shut your eyes when the time comes." The catgirl turned back to the bandits surrounding them. She took out the green gem she had looted in the dungeon. "Would this do instead of me?"

"Ayomide, they're thieves! You aren't expecting to negotiate with them, aren't you?!" Shinasi wasn't whispering, he was brazenly shouting to let the thieves hear his totally genuine concern. "I had to sell my family's heirloom golden... um... brush to buy that for you!"

The bandits laughed when they heard Shinasi plead for financial mercy. It looked like they had hit the jackpot, first they'd get the big precious-looking gem, then they'd get the small precious-looking catgirl. "Give it to us, then you can go." Their leader was amazed by the sheer naïveté shown by the catgirl, were all darkskins this dumb?

"Thank you for your generous grace, sir." Ayomide sluggishly approached the bandit leader, holding the gem right towards his face. Her hand covered the faces of the gem facing towards her

and her comrades. The leader lowered his weapon and stared at the gem intently, his wide smile reflected on the green glassy surface. Unfortunately, Ayomide was so rude as to interrupt a man's smile. "[Flash Bang]!"

The spell did what its name implied: a flash and a bang. First came a concentrated burst of light magic towards the semi-circle of bandits surrounding Brown and co., temporarily (perhaps even permanently) blinding them. The bandit leader had it worst out of all of them as his eyes were wide open and right in front of the magic. Then came the bang part of the flash-and-bang, where an explosion of wind magic (concentrated in one direction as to not harm one's allies) bursts forth to create the aforementioned "Bang!" The effects of hearing such a loud sound and having bright light shone right in your eyes are intuitive, many would agree that having a sparkling magical gem go "Bang!" next to your face wouldn't count as a pleasant experience.

In more scientific terms unknown to the people of Gemeinplatz, the sudden burst of light overwhelms one's photoreceptor cells making one go temporarily blind (permanently blind if this burst has strong ultraviolet rays which can deal permanent damage, akin to what would happen if you stared at the sun). The loud "Bang!" causes what's called a "temporary threshold shift", where sensitivity to lower noises (such as speech, important when you're a bandit leader) is reduced. A very loud "Bang!" can cause your eardrums to rupture and not work at all, something which might happen if your face is sitting right next to a magical gem operated by a very pissed off magical catgirl. Not to mention the fluid inside your ear, the thing that helps you get a sense of balance, bouncing around and making one feel very sick.

At that moment the bandit leader couldn't care less about the fancy scientific explanations listed above. All he knew was that his ears were ringing, that he had fallen to the ground after losing his balance and that he had suddenly gone blind. He shouted at his men to get the bastards, but his comrades weren't in a better state either. They were all rocking their heads, having lost all sense of direction.

"I think that'll be a bit harder to pull off next time." shouted Ayomide. She and her comrades standing towards her back were all fine, except for the fact that they were a bit scared after seeing eleven completely healthy men suddenly fall to the ground and begin calling for their mothers.

"Then let us skedaddle before what little wits they hold come back!" Brown didn't need to agree for their confirmation on this action. Ayomide and Shinasi had begun legging it before he had given any orders, the catgirl only briefly pausing to kick the bandit leader in the groin and spit on his face. Shinasi contributed as well, using the handle of his spear like a pestle before leaving. Brown shouted after them to not needlessly humiliate their enemies in such an unchristian fashion, but it was far too late to try and keep some decency in this family friendly series about a man wanting to enact judgement on all slavers.

Brown and co. began following the markers on the trees, hoping that the bandits would give up. On the contrary, the bandits were furious, pissed-off, and looking for blood. The first one who recovered was already after them, the rest of his comrades following suit in an odd conga line of those who recovered last at the back. Their leader was still absent, probably writhing somewhere on the ground while throwing racial slurs which needn't be conveyed in text. Shinasi turned his head back, thinking of fighting the one lone guy that was at the front of the conga line. He soon realized that pausing to fight one guy would give time for the rest of the conga line to catch up and make the lone guy not so lone anymore.

Thankfully, the bandits were still disoriented due to being unable to hear and see properly, so they weren't quick enough to catch up. Some of them had even crashed into trees or tripped on twigs on their wild-abolitionist chase. By the time Brown and co. had exited the forest, the number of angry men after them had dropped to six. Not a number they could claim absolute victory over without bruises, but an amount that Brown was willing to beat up nonetheless. He stopped and turned around towards the bandits, so did Ayomide and Shinasi in preparation for a tough battle.

The first brave soul to lunge forward was a bandit carrying a knife, who charged towards Shinasi in all his lack of wit at the current moment. The adventurer still carried his shield and spear, he lunged his spear forwards to force the man to pause before he swung forward with his shield to bash him right on the cheek. Being involved in more than one street fight back in Azdavay had made him adept at handling lightly equipped opponents with low combat skills and high courage. His opponent fell to the ground before the rest of the group had a chance to properly catch up with Brown and co. Catch up they quickly did however, and now Brown and co. had five angry men to deal with at once. These men stayed far away from Ayomide as they possibly could, but this was not of much use. She didn't have enough energy left in her to create another flash-bang like the last one, but a few wind spells directed at their legs did a good enough job of making them lose balance at the most inconvenient moments. Like that one guy who ended up tripping right into an unscheduled meeting with the business end of Brown's fist, or the other who had tripped and bashed his head right onto Shinasi's shield.

And then there were three, before a gunshot rang out and there were none who weren't running away. "Shit, it must be the Imperials with those guns!" shouted one bandit as he disappeared off into another forest, all six of them had managed to stay conscious enough to scatter and skedaddle.

Brown collapsed on to the floor, out of breath and way out of the limits of what his old body could manage without a healthy dose of adrenaline. "Oh, thank the Lord, thank the Lord... Oh glory..." He would have begun praying further if not for the fact that he had just heard a gunshot. He shouted towards the general direction of the explosion "Who are you?!"

A woman's voice shouted back at them from up close. "It is I, Doctor Raban Rabanowicz Rabanow of Kiyelm, monsieur Smith and madame Ayomide!" Soon a familiar figure, flanked by the familiar figure of Watanabe, popped out from behind some conveniently placed boulders. She held a plain wheellock pistol whose barrel was smoking. "We heard some commotion, and I thought that maybe a bit of noise could help you out." She opened her book, actually a small chest which was designed to look like a book from the inside, and took a bag of gunpowder out of it. The doctor continued to speak while reloading her weapon, a long process which would take more than half a minute. "What brings you here?"

"We were..." Brown hadn't been ready to give excuses for what they were doing. "...transporting some cargo out of town before a bunch of those men attacked us."

"I see, a bunch of deplorable thieves." Rabanowicz rammed a ball of lead and some powder through the barrel of the gun. "We were here due to not having enough money to enter the town due to thieves of the legal kind. They only scoffed when I showed them my silver leaves." She finished the process of reloading her gun by cocking the wheel mechanism into a safe position with a spanner before putting it back into her "book". "Me and Watanabe set up a little camp here if you need a rest."

"Yes. Mister Smith, we'd be very glad to have you here!" announced Watanabe in an exaggerated matter. "Maybe we could have a chat about where the hell we are in more detail?"

Shinasi stopped Brown before he could speak. “Captain, shouldn’t we work to evacuate the goods?”

“If the bandits want them, then they’ve most likely pillaged them by now. If they don’t, then nobody’s coming into that forest other than us.” replied Brown, who was still out of breath. “Do you want us to try to navigate back there in this state, young man?”

“Right.” Shinasi and Ayomide didn’t exactly want to reenter the forest either.

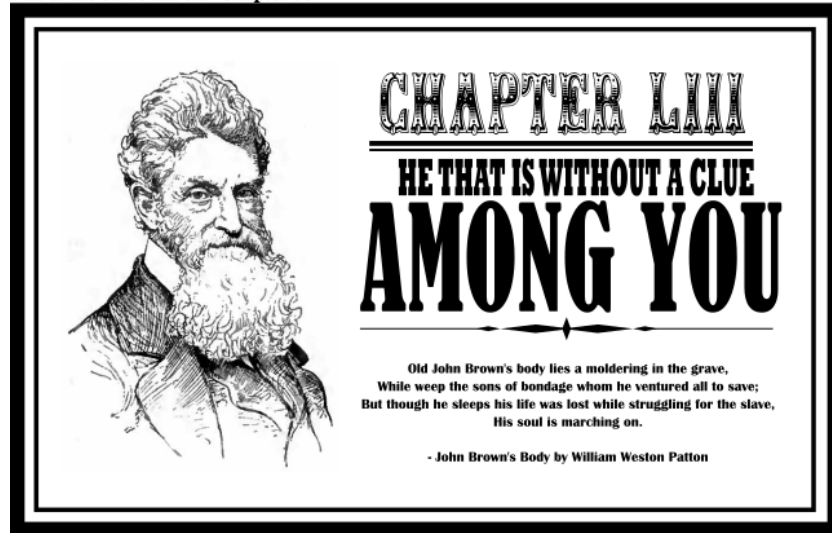
Brown turned back to Rabanowicz and Watanabe “We’ll be glad to sample your hospitality. We all need a rest.”

“Perfect. I have some tea in my bag if you’re interested.” Rabanowicz opened a large knapsack which sat by her waist. She took out two small cups and a bag presumably containing tea. “These are fresh leaves collected from near Sherifeld... Though I can surmise that none of you know where that is.”

Brown had many questions, so did Rabanowicz, and both sides met next to a bonfire to discuss matters related to multiverses.

Chapter 56: Chapter LIII – He that is without a clue among you.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 53



MMXXIII - The Cabbage Preacher

30th of Summer, 5859

Outskirts of the City of Casamonu, Casamonu

A fire raged on. Not a metaphorical one, an actual fire raged on the side of the highway as an errant group had met up to have a rest. Rabanowicz put her steel fire striker back into her satchel and sat on the ground along with the trio she had invited. “By Kiyelm, I’ll have ye all know that we truly have no idea where we are currently located. Except for the fact that this place is named... Excuse me, what was this realm named again?”

Watanabe butted in. “*Gemainpuradzu*, if I recall right.”

“Yes, *Gemaynplodz*.” Rabanowicz instinctively readjusted her spectacles as she continued to speak “I’d like to know where we are on the globe as I have unfortunately not heard of this place. Do you know where Lahanezy is?”

Brown, Shinasi and Ayomide all looked at each other looking for an answer. Not a hint of understanding or crumbs of knowledge were found on their faces. The old man had to break the bad news to them. “No, we do not know of a Laheighetsee.”

“Éirois?”

“...No.”

“Molli?”

“...None of us seem to know that place either.”

“Nehoun? Tovkjo?”

Shinasi stood up, getting a bit too excited over knowing something for once in his life. “Yes! That’s- That’s like the capital of some place on Örf, isn’t it?”

Dr. Rabanowicz solemnly rested her chin on her hands, clearly in deep thought. “If you know of that place...” She hummed and closed her eyes for a while. “...The only logical conclusion as the we’re on Earth.”

“Doctor, I’d like to inform you of the fact that Earth doesn’t have catgirls.” replied Watanabe, ever familiar with his home planet.

“It doesn’t? But there’s one right in front of us, can you actually disprove my thesis that we are on Earth? Have you travelled everywhere on Earth, monsieur? How have you spoken so deeply and fervently about catgirls if they do not exist at all?”

Even the old earthling Brown couldn’t help but doubt himself when facing someone speaking so assuredly. Catgirls could have been hiding somewhere in Africa for all he knew with his 19th century knowledge. Still, he had gone over this issue plenty of times with Harriet Tubman. “We definitely are not anywhere on Earth, Doctor Rabanowicz. This is an entirely different place, though...” The old man paused, noticing a slight issue. “...that begs the question, where are *you* from?”

“The village of Kiyelm, far north of the empire of the Éirois. We realistically cannot be too far from where we last were...” There was much silence. Both sides had heard of Earth, yet they knew not of where the other came from. Either they were very lost, or they were all going through some sort of mass hysteria.

The only person to have slowly formed an idea was Watanabe, who stood up and grabbed a large stick from the ground. He drew four circles on the ground and labelled them separately in a script that was known to no one else. “Alright, I think I have some sort of idea.” This prospect of someone having any idea caught the attention of everyone else, so they were listening to Watanabe attentively. He pointed the stick towards the circle he had labelled “Earth” and said “So, I come from here.”

“...young man, you come from a nondescript circle on the ground?” replied Brown.

Watanabe retracted his rhetorical stick for a second “Nondescript? I’d say that it’s pretty non-nondescript with that label... Oh, you’re right, it’d be pretty weird if you all knew how to read *kanji*.” He revised his model of Earth by adding very crude drawings of the continents into the circle. “Anyways, this is called Earth, and it’s where I come from. It has places like *Nihon*, *Chuugoku*, *Kankoku*, *Amerika*...”

Brown raised his hand “I’m from the United States, so I’d be from Earth as well.”

“Then we’re in a similar situation.” Watanabe moved onto another circle he scratched and pointlessly labeled. “This one’s the place with *Rahaneji*, *Ayuroyu*, that place with all the weird names where Doctor Rabanowicz comes from and where I ended up after I died.”

Now Rabanowicz raised her hand in objection “Monsieur, I’d say that ‘*Czuvgoku*’ is an even odder name, but do go on.”

“And this circle, this one is *Gemainpuradzu*, the place where we apparently are in right now. From what I can understand, Mr. Smith came from Earth to here. I assume that happened after your death? My original transmigration to another world happened when I kicked the bucket by kicking a bucket and falling headfirst on to the ground while trying to run away from a truck.”

“You would be right Mr. Watanabe. I last remember meeting my timely end and...” Brown furrowed his brows. What had happened right after his supposed death? “...and, and... there was some sort of voice? I unfortunately cannot remember who or what I heard back then, but I remember feeling light and floating in a white, empty space.” He assumed that the voices he heard must have been the chatter of his executioners before his consciousness had finally faded.

Watanabe nodded in response “Interesting, I had a similar experience. I remember... Well, I only vaguely recall, speaking to someone in a big empty space. All I remember was that I was very pissed off before I got sent to the dimension inhabited by the likes of Doctor Rabanowicz.” He suddenly turned to Rabanowicz “Actually, what were we doing before we ended up here?”

“Erm, uhm...” Rabanowicz scratched her head, adjusting her spectacles and looked around for a second before digging out a thick stack of papers barely bound by leather. She flipped it around for a while before seemingly reaching a satisfying conclusion. “We were going to investigate...” Her eyes flew around her notes “...investigate the phenomenon of people like you entering completely different worlds by conducting an interview with a local nobleman. We had set off on the road before... before... before, what exactly?” She looked completely dumbfounded, her mouth remaining open for a second while it let out incoherent noises which signaled that no coherent thoughts were being made. “...did we die? How? When?!” The doctor patted her own body to check if she still inhabited a corporeal form. “Oh, thank the One Above, I am still left tangible and breathing.”

“Yes, let us thank the Lord for letting us stay alive even in this quite ridiculous circumstance.” Brown and the doctor both quickly muttered some prayers in an odd sync.

Watanabe had to wait for them to finish prayer before he could go on. “...anyways, what I have gathered is that there seems to be a common way which we have all been isekai’d. Empty white space, some sort of chatter, and a sense floating...” He idly scratched on the ground while doing his best to ponder deep metaphysical questions. “...and how weirdly this all coincides with isekai literature found in my world... Gah!” He threw the stick somewhere far away. His head had begun to hurt after having thought too much. “This is all to weird, don’t you think?!” One could hear the stick hit a tree not too far away. Reading about isekai was all too fine, but actually being isekai’d made a modern man like Watanabe think too much about complicated questions. “Damn it, I just wanted to be an overpowered hero in another world, not deal with this nonsense!”

Rabanowicz rolled her eyes, looking away from the raving lunatic. “Here he goes about being ‘overpowered’ again...”

Shinasi briefly jumped into the conversation, finally having something of value to add. “I can understand him. Becoming ‘overpowered’, or ‘OP’ for short, is the final goal of any adventurer.” He jumped out the convo as quickly as he had entered it.

Brown had a more productive question on his mind. “What’d this ‘isekai literature’ refer to, young man?”

Watanabe returned to his senses after being asked a question “It makes sense that an old American wouldn’t know about it. It’s a genre where someone gets transported into another world, just like the situation you and I are in.”

Rabanowicz scoffed upon hearing what an isekai was. “That’s it?”

“Well, there are also subgenres, like otome isekai... and...” Watanabe was about to talk about GameLit and LitRPGs, but he realized that all he said would be moot against people who had none of the concepts needed to understand either of those things. “...a lot of other things which’d take a very long time to explain. I had time to read a lot of them when slaving away in the office.”

“Slaving away?” Now was Ayomide’s turn to suddenly butt into the conversation. “You were a slave on Earth?”

“No, no, no, that was just metaphorical. My boss worked me like a slave, but at least I was free to leave and starve on the streets.” replied Watanabe, his voice becoming louder and audibly a whole lot more annoyed at the mention of his boss. “I’d rather camp out here in the woods forever rather than go back and work as a salaryman again. May I also be damned if I become the type of protagonist to buy a slave! Those types were always such a turn-off for me...” Watanabe would have rather had the ladies flock to him due to his OP powers, not because of obligation. “What good is there in a harem if the girls don’t genuinely love you?!” He was about to continue his rant before he realized that he was getting confused glares from everyone again.

“Slavery? What a deplorable institution.” Rabanowicz followed up with her own monologue. “I’d say that those upmost heathenish cabbage-worshipping men back home deserve to be smitten for what they do unto others in their path to damnable greed.”

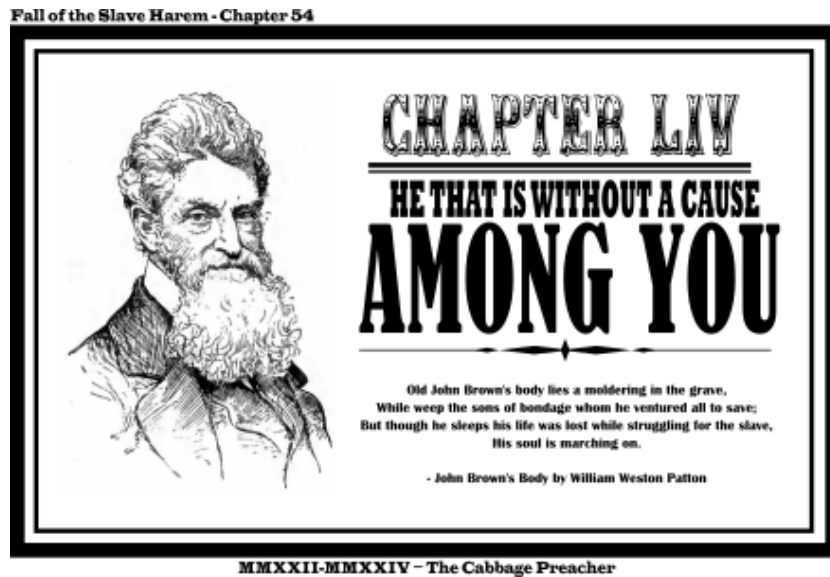
Brown liked where the doctor had gone with her overly loquacious monologue. “While I know not of any ‘cabbage-worshipping’, I do know that enslaving others and putting your fellow man below you is a grave sin.

“Indeed, it is.” Rabanowicz took a look at a metal pot which she had put over the fire. It was bubbling hot by now, so she began pouring the water into smaller cups she had also carried with her all the way to Gemeinplatz. “This may be a controversial opinion to hold, but I’d even go so far as to say that the vanquishment of a slaver is a net good for the moral and material commonwealth of a realm.”

“I’d say that vanquishing my boss would have been a ‘net good for the moral and material commonwealth’ as well.” added Watanabe as he accepted a cup of tea. Being the big damn hero vanquishing bosses seemed like an amicable idea to him. “If there are any bosses nearby, point me towards their direction and I’ll slay them.” he added half-jokingly.

“Interesting. I am glad to have encountered such kindred spirits even if we are from completely different places.” Brown received his cup of tea as well. “I have a proposal to make to you fine gentleman and lady. Maybe you’d like to hear it over tea?”

Chapter 57: Chapter LIV – He that is without a cause among you.



32th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

While going up Mount Curry, one might take notice of many wonderful sights. The grass ever wettened by the endless rain accompanied by the smell of wet earth, the endless forest of trees feeding off of the endless rain and, of course, an ever-growing band of abolitionists who live here in their secret natural habitat. Blocked by mountains, trees, and tree-filled mountains, they were perfectly hidden, not to be found by any soul walking on this not-Earth. Except for those who could fly, but they were pretty rare in Gemeinplatz.

Amongst the rare walking souls who knew of this location was Brown and co, who were on a mission of express delivery. Their cargo consisted of two new people that they had happened to meet along the way: an errant pair, an otherworlder and a doctor of some description. Rabanowicz had actually needed to clarify that she was not a “medical doctor”, whatever that was, and that she was a “student of natural philosophy”, whatever that was only Brown could understand. The others could only think of her as either insane, extremely alien, or extremely rich as to become the student of a thing they hadn’t heard about.

On the other hand, the old man had gotten very interested in her, having been speaking about various matters of “science” as Brown called it, and “natural philosophy” as Rabanowicz called it. It was a weird battle of semantics, Rabanowicz calling herself a “philosopher” while Brown insisted that a better title for her would be a “man of science” or a “scientist”. Coming from completely separate worlds with completely separate cultures and levels of scientific understanding didn’t help them reach very far in this semantic debate. What they could reach consensus on however was that: 1. Enslaving people was “cringe” (as Brown put it to appeal to the modern youngster Watanabe) and 2. They had been brought to Gemeinplatz for some sort of divine mission. The nature of the “divine” part of this “divine mission” was very much up to debate however, Brown unable to convince Rabanowicz to accept the Trinity no matter what. Her insistence on a non-capital-G god of one unified nature wasn’t fitting in well with Brown’s religious doctrine either. There was also the problem that she carried around a bible very different

from the Bible, filled with the names of places that no one expect Rabanowicz had heard. Perhaps this was the biggest cultural shock to Brown: an entirely separate realm which had not heard a single word of the Good Book. He thought that Rabanowicz must have just been unlucky as to not encounter it back home.

Brown and co. noticed something odd when they scaled up to the cliffside containing their hidden encampment. The number of mud huts had increased twofold since their absence, so had the number of freemen in the camp. One could even begin calling this place a “village” rather than a “place with a bunch of huts in close proximity”, though the pedantic types might argue that those two are the same thing and that this place was a village from the beginning. Rather than pointlessly argue about more semantics however, Brown was more interested in investigating the sudden population boom. Thankfully Tubman was at work outdoors, and she quickly noticed the arrival of the people she had been waiting for. “Good morning, Captain Brown. I see that you’ve noticed our new members?” She watched as Brown and his company dragged along a cart full of textiles and dropped it in front of her. A group of freemen immediately descended upon the cart, taking the goods to fashion them into whatever they needed.

“It’s hard to not notice your work, General Tubman.” replied Brown “I’ve brought over some people of my own too.” Rabanowicz and Watanabe waved at Tubman, though their minds were busier with examining the sad state of Libertycave. Still, this seemed better than camping outside the city due to being unable to pay the toll. “Meet Doctor Rabanoich, and Mister Wah... Wahtel... Wa... err...”

“Watanabe, sir.”

“Yes, Mister Watanabe. We found them in quite the pinch and...” Brown quickly summarized his previous experiences with the errant pair “...they agreed to stay with us for a while.” Watanabe and Rabanowicz then proceeded on with a round of their self-introductions, a process that took a few minutes and didn’t relay any more information other than the fact that Watanabe carried around a saber with him (not that he knew how to fight with it) for saber-rattling purposes. It looked out of place when paired with his very ordinary business suit, though he did look very proud of himself when swinging it around like an amateur.

“I see. Thank the Lord for guiding them here.” Tubman called over a copperworker who worked with Bilal “You should be of great help to the copperworkers, make your way to Bilal and he’ll find something for you.” The doctor and the copperworker blended into the crowd and disappeared from sight. “As for you...” Tubman looked at Watanabe, who didn’t exert an air of any sort of confidence or ability. He was a thin, twig-like man who’d probably collapse if she made him do any sort of hard labor. “...you... You can join Shinasi in patrolling the outskirts.”

Watanabe raised his hand like a shy little school boy. “Umm, General Tubman?”

“Yes?”

“What’s the pay for this job?”

Tubman couldn’t help but laugh at the question. “We give you food, a hut, and you’re free to do whatever you want for the rest of the day. This place is a settlement of the freest men in this realm, so I think helping maintain that is payment enough.”

“...right.” Watanabe didn’t look to bummed. He was a simple man, content as long as he was not forced to work in an office 24/7 from Monday to Sunday again. With a gaillard gait he marched

with Shinasi so that he could be trained in the ancient art of “standing around and marching around a particular set of points”.

Tubman watched the new recruits disappear into the crowd before turning back to her old comrade. “Back to you, Captain Brown. I think you have some questions to ask me?”

“I don’t have some, I have many questions to ask of you General Tubman.” Brown groaned a bit while supporting his back with his arms “However, I’d like to do so while resting my tired legs.”

Tubman gladly accepted Brown’s invitation to sit down and have a chat, telling him of her excursions to various locales around Casamonu. John Brown was most pleased to hear of her adventures, and they ended their conversation with a brief prayer session that lasted an hour. Unbeknownst to them however, Tubman had ended up accidentally kicking the first domino in a long chain which’d lead to big changes in the county...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★



33th of Summer, 5859
Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

Things had slowly calmed down, for a while anyways. Count Leon had spent a whole lot of time writing letters, shaking hands and licking boots to make sure that trade would return. The Copperworkers’ Guild was close to open revolt by the time he had managed to convince merchants that it was safe to engage in the copper trade again. The United Guild of Textile Manufacturers & Winemakers was even grumpier until he had managed to get one of his close family associates to send a caravan over to buy their goods (the count had made a tidy profit from this deal of course). Things were slowly returning to a new normal, and Count Leon was counting the days until the whole mass hysteria about the slave revolt would wash over and he could go back to counting his money again like a good count could be counted on to do. Those savages had probably eaten each other in the mountains by now, what was there to worry about?

Of course, it had turned out that the count couldn’t count on what he had expected to count on.

“Your Excellency, the landed gentry of Casamonu have come together with a common petition.” Poor Hilmi, his personal servant, had to be the one delivering the very thick and full envelope to

him. “They’re askin-”

“I can read the letter on my own. You’re dismissed.” said Leon, dismissing the servant further with a motion of his hands. Having been doubly dismissed, Hilmi bowed and exited the room to leave his master to his own frustration.

Count Leon ripped open the letter quickly, scraps of torn paper flying around the room. He could instinctively sense that the contents wouldn’t be anything pleasant. He was surprised, not at the contents being unpleasant, but the degree of unpleasantness the content contained. The count was expecting something more typical, there were a couple of his annoying vassals who tried to lower their obligations by calling a favor here and there. Leon would promptly ignore them of course, but seeing their impudence would still annoy him to no end. Not to mention having to write them a long-winded letter about the obligations of a vassal, and then replying to their further pitiful letters... This however, this was a completely different situation that was uncalled for.

“Your Excellency, we have grave news to inform you of. We have had the slave quarters of three plantations burnt down this week. These likely won’t be the last. Please, we beg of you to...” The rest was a long request for help, filled with flower words and prose to lighten the impact. In short however, the landed gentry wished for the count to investigate the situation and assign patrols to protect their land. There was one problem however: countless plantations operated in Casamonu alone, and it was not like Leon was made out of money. Just protecting a few of them would cause his vassals to suspect that he might be playing favorites, while protecting all equally was impossible without him going bankrupt himself. Investigating the situation was possible, but finding anything useful out of a vague description of “someone is burning the slave quarters” wasn’t going to be possible if the perpetrators weren’t caught.

That’s when Leon realized a big problem. He had assumed that this ruckus had been caused by the fugitives, but upon closer examination, he realized that the burnt down buildings in question were slave quarters with the corpses of the slaves being found under them. Would they really kill their own? It did seem like a way of fighting slavery, but... not a way that made any sense even to Leon. He did give enough credit to the savages to think that they wouldn’t burn their own for fun. There must have been someone else at play here... or so thought Count Leon. Perhaps it was someone trying to destabilize his rule, a pretender, a traitor amongst our midst... *Who among us could it be?*

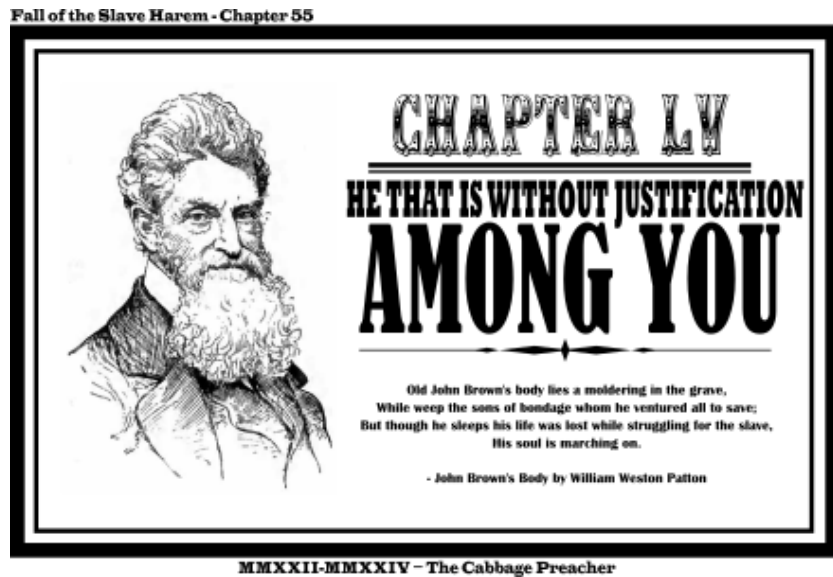
Leon’s head was aching now. He didn’t like it when it ached, so he threw the letter away from himself. The count needed relief, somehow or someday. Things would have been much easier if the slaves hadn’t escaped from the mine... Wait, how had they managed to escape in the first place? To lay such a perfect ambush, to, to... Leon’s mind was a mess, but he did arrive at a clear conclusion. Somebody must have ratted his men out, and getting this rat out of his hole would definitely give him relief. He knew that only one person had gotten in direct communication with the slaves, and clearly, that person would be the traitor.

“Hilmi! Come back. I need you to gather my retainers!”

Paranoia. Fear. Betrayal. The opposite of Leon’s usual diplomatic approach, a drastic shift in policy which would cause a great shift in the realm.

Shift was about to go down.

Chapter 58: Chapter LV – He that is without justification among us.



34th of Summer, 5859 Earlywatch Estate, Outskirts of Casamonu

Nominally, it was a quiet summer day outside of the Earlywatch estate. It was a quiet day in general for most of Gemeinplatz, like many other days in the rural areas. Some birds chirped, some grass rustled, and every human person got to work in order to fulfill their obligations to their lord. Whether it be the lowliest peasants walking to the fields in order to produce grain to pay their exorbitant taxes, servants waking up to serve the local lord or the local lord waking up to serve another lord above them. A pyramid, from top to bottom, where the bottom makes all and the top takes all. Like all pyramids however, or any Euclidian geometric shape for that matter, everything collapses if the bottom is removed, and the top part would be right to worry if they suddenly had their slaves planning to topple them down to the bottom (or the grave).

A group of people, belonging somewhere a bit further down from the bottom of the pyramid, were on their way to enact the orders of someone very high up on the pyramid. A couple of professional soldiers, a rare breed in Gemeinplatz, from Count Leon's retinue were riding on their horses towards the Earlywatch estate.



Compared to the disorganized and ragtag nature of levied troops or hired adventurers, these men exuded an aura of know-how on how to fight. They were covered in full plate, mostly iron while some of the fancier gents could afford steel, shining bright like a humanoid disco ball. To increase the effectiveness of “awe” in their “shock-and-awe” tactics, these cavalrymen also had long skirts of the highest quality silk, those floating around as their horses trotted forwards to their destination. They hadn’t forgotten about their helmets either, all of them having some sort of plume that also showed off the count’s wealth. Most of them, like any good cavalryman, carried lances and shield into battle, while some of the more skilled ones hired from Eastern Gemeinplatz carried bows on horseback. These men could easily defeat if they were to somehow face every adventurer in Northern Gemeinplatz at once, except for the otherworlders whom oft had BS cheat-skills which could smite these poor (or wealthy) sods down.

Luckily, for the retainers at least, they’d be facing local Gemeinplatzers. If things went well, they wouldn’t have to face anyone at all. Having any sort of faceoff could lead to casualties, which meant a loss in lives, and a loss in lives meant a loss in material, and a loss in material wasn’t a thing that the count (or anyone else for that matter) liked. The leader of these men, one Sir Korvus Jr., son of Korvus Sr., would have also loved to report that he had managed to execute the operation flawlessly without any casualties. He had high hopes, and a scout returning to him could see Sir Korvus have a slight smile on his face. Unfortunately, the scout would have to wipe that smirk off his face as scouts tended to do to their superiors with their untimely reports. “Sir, the men of Earlywatch have already assembled at the gate of their estate. They seem ready to meet us in combat, sir.”

Sir Korvus looked up at the heavens, towards where the Divine would be supposedly watching over him. It seemed that they had been spotted already, not surprising that the Earlywatch family would also be exercising caution. They had most likely scouts of their own circling the area, looking for any sizable military formations like the one Sir Korvus was commanding. “The gate? We’re assaulting a minor estate; we should be able to simply jump over the fence and flank them easily.”

“I was talking about the gate of the estate’s mansion itself, sir. They’ve huddled inside the main building, and have troops overlooking from the windows.” The scout had to pause, unsure whether he should relay one last piece of information. “...one of my men were killed by a stray bolt of lightning that came from them.”

“The Earlywatch killed one of yours?” Killing one of the count’s men was a pretty open act of rebellion, even if it was done in self-defense. Now Baha had less of a chance to be given a lenient sentence, though he had already exhausted most of his chance by “collaborating” with the fugitives.

Sir Korvus hurried his men onwards, intending to apprehend Baha as soon as possible. He hoped that they’d do the reasonable thing and give up when faced with such overwhelming forces. The estate’s mansion slowly came into view, the fields around it appearing to have been stripped bare of anything loatable. No peasants were in sight, the poor souls having fled inside upon hearing rumors of a cavalry force approaching them. There were no people in sight except for the men of Sir Korvus, who now awkwardly stood outside the mansion while waiting for orders to be given.

One brave man from the mansion, his hands raised upwards and himself clearly unarmed, approached the mass of soldiers outside. A small group of mages surrounding Sir Korvus hit him with a few rounds of magic draining spells before he was allowed to approach further. “Good morning to you, good sirs.” The messenger took off his hat and bowed in respect to the noble men in front of him. “Sir Baha Earlywatch would like to know what or whom we owe your visit to?” He already actually had the answer to “who” considering the retainers bore the arms of the duke, but asking that was necessary for politeness’ sake.

“We’re here to apprehend Sir Baha Earlywatch on orders of His Excellency Count Leon Satō-Wang of Casamonu. He has committed against crimes against the commonwealth of this realm by colluding with fugitives, and committed an open act of rebellion against his liege by murdering one of his men in cold blood.” replied Sir Korvus to the messenger. “His Excellency has promised to show leniency to your liege if he is to come out without showing further resistance.”

Unfortunately, the messenger had already been given strict orders on how to respond, and he cared not for Sir Korvus’ promise of leniency. “We appreciate the count’s generosity in giving my liege leniency for what His Excellency claims is such a grave crime, but Sir Baha absolutely will not hand himself over on such misguided and false charges against him. My liege pleads for His Excellency to keep calm, consider his misguided notions, and remember his duties to his vassals as a liege.”

Even more unfortunately, Sir Korvus didn’t exactly have any choice on skirting around the strict orders given to him either. He cared not for the messenger’s seemingly amicable words. “No matter what Sir Baha believes, we’ve received an absolute order from His Excellency. My men are not to leave until we’ve fulfilled that order.”

“I understand, sir.” Everything had went as expected for both sides: a diplomatic stalemate formed from absolute orders. “Have a good day.” Both men saluted each other before the messenger made his way back to the mansion. It was a polite conversation after all, as polite as a conversation between two sides who were planning on murdering each other could reasonably be, though that’s par for the course for the upper-classes who’d stab each other in the back with a wide grin on their faces. Stabbing each other in the front required an even wider grin, and some flowery language to soften the impact.

With the messenger safely back in his mansion and negotiations concluded, Sir Korvus now had to consider what he had to do next. He had obviously expected for Sir Baha's men to surrender immediately upon seeing the finest men of Count Leon, so his plans sort of ended right at apprehending Sir Baha and returning home. The commander took out his binoculars, sold to him by the company of a certain otherworlder named "Kim", and zoomed in to the mansion which stood far away. He could see an armed soldier behind every window, and a wall of shields and spears behind the gate that served as the entrance to the mansion. Entering such a fortified position would be difficult, even for the finest men of the count. Korvus would have sufficed by threatening to burn the building down, if not for the fact that the mansion was made out of nonflammable brick. Either he had to commit to a deadly assault or...

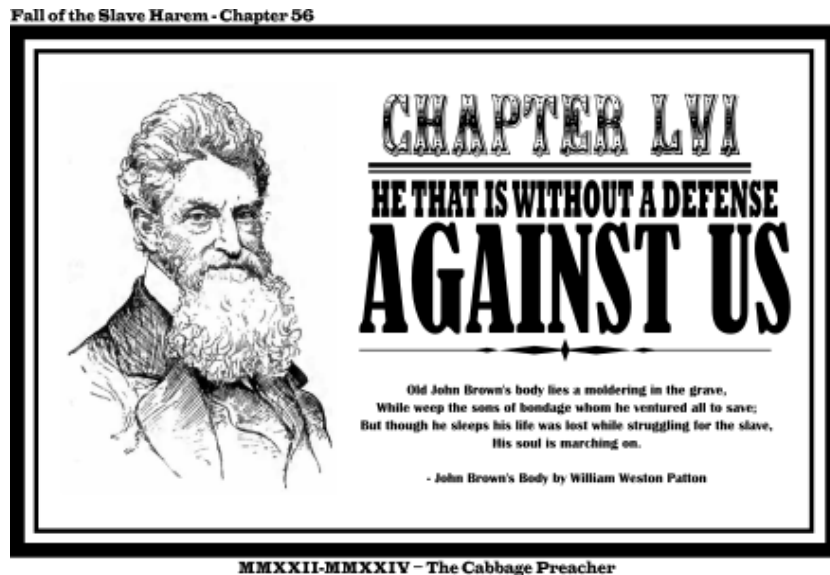
"Men! Prepare for a siege." He had enough to blockade the mansion, and such a small place would most likely not have an extensive stockpile of food or water to last them. The cavalrymen got into position around the mansion, getting off their horses and beginning to set up camp. Sir Baha's men didn't have any obvious means of viable counterattack, save for occasionally taking a potshot. Sir Korvus waited another hour while watching his men set simple earthen fortifications which'd surround the mansion. He expected that Sir Baha might surrender now that they had shown a willingness to siege him down, but that didn't happen either.

The petty lord seemed to be stubborn in not letting go easily, which was quite the annoyance. Most lords would have turned themselves in hopes of getting lenience, which they'd almost always get. The execution of a nobleman was a pretty rare occurrence, Sir Korvus estimated that Baha might get exiled out of the county at worst if he had just surrendered. Something seemed fishy to the commander, about Sir Baha showing so much resistance, but he couldn't exactly turn around from here and do his own thing.

The best Sir Korvus could do now was send a scout over to inform His Excellency Count Leon that they were laying siege to the estate, and ask him if he had any further orders. That he did, and as the scout disappeared into the sunset, Sir Korvus got off from his own horse and prepared for a short, simple siege.

Or, to be more accurate, something that *should have been* a short and simple siege...

Chapter 59: Chapter LVI – He that is without a defense against us.



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

39th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Textiles: They're an old human tradition from the Neolithic to the John Brownitic. Getting a fresh pair of trousers, whether these trousers be from the pelt of the long-extinct mammoth or the long-extant silkworm, is a time-honored tradition that is most likely to continue as long as trousers are in fashion. Then the next thing will be fashionable until trousers are back in fashion until they aren't and so on and so forth as the cycle of fashion continues forward, backwards, sometimes upwards and then downwards. A cycle of fashion which, no matter which universe one finds oneself in, one can find easily whether it be in the hair of a fashionable macaroni in Great Britain or the broad cuffs of a fugitive slave in Libertycave.

"I finished a shirt here, cross that one off!"

On the order of the freemen, little Tater erased a line from the tally of clothes orders. It was a simple system they had set up in a newly constructed mud hut: an illustration of the item, and tally marks next to it to mark how much was needed. Brown had tried to give the freemen a crash course on how to write numbers the earthling way, and some had actually learned quickly enough to write every number they might need, but tally marks were universal enough to be understood by everyone.

Understanding was especially important due to the newly freed slaves from the plantations, some of them had been recently brought over to Gemeinplatz and didn't know the language. Most of them had stayed, not wanting to set out for freedom in a land they knew nothing about. Communication through hand gestures were good enough to get these men working on the simplest of tasks; it didn't take much to hand someone a spear and tell them how to swing it around. A similar thing had happened with the textile work, the new recruits were already at work in the "clothes shack".

The clothes shack was, as it's less-than-grand title suggested clear as day, a shack. Small, cramped, yet surprisingly functional. It was part of the new generation of mud huts in Libertycave, the generation with actual wooden supports and pillars to hold it together. The floor was made of fired

brick covered with “pillows” made out of straw and wool. Light only came through a hole at the top and small frames constructed out of wood. These windowless frames were only possible thanks to a combination of the ransomed tools and newly forged copper nails. Productivity had increased severalfold ever since the freemen were able to see themselves while indoors. On other bright news, the rate of sore behinds had decreased somewhere around 97.8% after the freemen began placing textiles like linen on the hard grounds they sat and napped at. For the first time in a while, old Brown had woken up without feeling like his spine was a lost cause. What seemed like a simple delivery of textiles had ended up upping the morale of the men by a margin greater than one might initially assume.

“Boot’s done, cross it!”

Tater erased yet another line from the tally that sat next to an image of a boot. Unlike construction, which almost all slaves had no experience in, tailoring was a skill that almost everybody in Gemeinplatz had dabbled in whether they were under chains or under the delusion of thinking they were free under their lords. Mass clothes production was a part of industrial society and its consequences, and the people of Gemeinplatz didn’t have the luxury of emptying their wallets for designer shirts. Professional tailors only existed in the urban areas, the urban areas in which a majority of people in an agrarian society don’t reside in. Peasants often made their own clothes, which was true for slaves as well. Libertycave had quickly gotten rid of its population of shirtless people, which was a plus if this story was ever to be adopted in a family friendly fashion for television.

With the most necessary clothes made, some of the more fashionable freemen had even begun attempts at imitating the high fashion of the urban elite, adding embroidered cuffs and frills on their outfits. Brown and Tubman didn’t agree with this unchristian show of vanity, but the people here were free, as the title of “freemen” implied, to decorate their clothes as they wanted.

Some minds were on a more correct track however, those minds working on making “armor”. A layer of stuffing filled with hair and scrap textiles, sandwiched between two layers of linen or wool made an effective enough gambeson for the military of Libertycave. Not was this armor decently protective in combat, but it’d also protect one against the cold elements whenever the dreadful winter came to visit. With this development, the most capable warriors of Libertycave had slowly distinguished themselves with the gambeson they were given, and with their distinguishment came organized training.

“One two three, one two three... Good, you’re not breaking your lines!” shouted Ayomide. She now looked the part of a proper warrior, the clothes stolen from the late mine owner being replaced by thick gambeson. Her once bare head was now crowned by the steel helmet (and former bowl) from the very late Watanabe Generico. A company of spearmen followed her from behind, doing their best to maintain cohesion in their march. The former waitress wasn’t the most experienced in military leadership, and Brown would usually be the one doing the training, but Captain Ayomide took over whenever Captain Brown was off doing the many tasks he busied himself with. Making the man train to walk together in a straight line wasn’t the hardest to attempt. Ayomide knew not why such choreography would ever be useful, she thought that scattering behind some trees and pelting their enemies with spears was good enough. Still, the old man seemed to be experienced in martial matters much more than her, so the catgirl could only trust Brown that he knew what he was doing...

...probably.

Ayomide's company reached an empty square in the middle of the newly establishing town of Libertycave, the freemen watching the soldiers of the League of Gileadites do their rounds.

"Halt!"

The soldiers did as ordered by Ayomide, forming a line of spears that was two ranks deep. This was about as deep as they could go before the ranks at the bank risked skewering their comrades at the front with their current setup of weaponry. The men at the front had been already issued shields, though it'd probably take a thousand witnesses to call these "five planks held together by copper nails" a shield. These would, at their best, serve to give an illusion of safety to the troops.

"Let us square up!"

Brown had also insisted on making the men practice this weird maneuver, where the men would enter into formation to form a square that was empty in the middle. This was much harder than it sounded, and it took a good three minutes before the men had pushed each other into an acceptable shape. Shielded men were at the front, with the unshielded spear-throwers standing on the back. This was (according to old Brown) meant to counter cavalry, a factor which everyone in Gemeinplatz knew almost from birth to fear. Those who could afford to go on a horse were the wealthy, usually noblemen, who could also afford training and equipment. Seeing such well-trained, well-armed men charging towards you on horseback was enough to break the morale of any army unprepared to deal with them. Cavalry wasn't that big of a concern atop a mountain, horses are famously bad at climbing mountains unless they're a special breed of horse developed by Bethesda, but they'd become a big concern at the flatland below. Horses, intelligent enough to understand that running towards sharp objects wasn't a good idea, would refuse to run into the wall of armed men in the square which would allow the spear throwers at the back to target the cavalymen... in theory at least. The reality was a confused mess of men making a shape that looked something like a square if Ayomide squinted hard enough.

"Okay, you're dismissed for today." Ayomide couldn't help but heave a sigh as the mass of men dissolved. Making men march in a square? What kind of weird fantasies was the old man having? Not even divine intervention could make such a big mass of man walk in a straight line, let alone a whole square. The catgirl captain found a nearby rock to seat herself on, her backside being cushioned by the thick layers of gambeson. All she wanted to do was skewer some slavers, the spear in her hand was twitching around to confirm that fact, not conduct choreography exercises. She was unlike Tubman or Brown, and like many other freemen in Libertycave her mind couldn't comprehend a world where their goals were accomplished and they were truly free. Hence, most of them didn't have any long-term plans beyond simple survival. What geometric shapes, a square that was definitely non-donut shaped, had to do with survival wasn't exactly clear.

Ayomide's break was suddenly interrupted by someone calling for him, that someone being famous slimeslayer, experienced leatherworker and radical abolitionist John Brown. The catgirl looked over to where he was and pinched her nose to close it once she realized where Brown was standing at. She slowly marched over to Brown, breathing in from her mouth as to not smell the dung-laden leather being processed by the old man's new disciples. "What is it that you need, old man?" Lines of leather, standing in attention like soldiers, were doing their best to breach Ayomide's nose through their pungent smell.

Brown took out a processed bear pelt from the rack, holding it towards Ayomide. She jumped a few steps back, prompting the old man to look a bit frustrated. "Young lady, it is simply a pelt."

“Yes, it’s simply a pelt. One that reeks of dung.” She looked up from the reeking pelt to see Brown. “So, what’s the matter?”

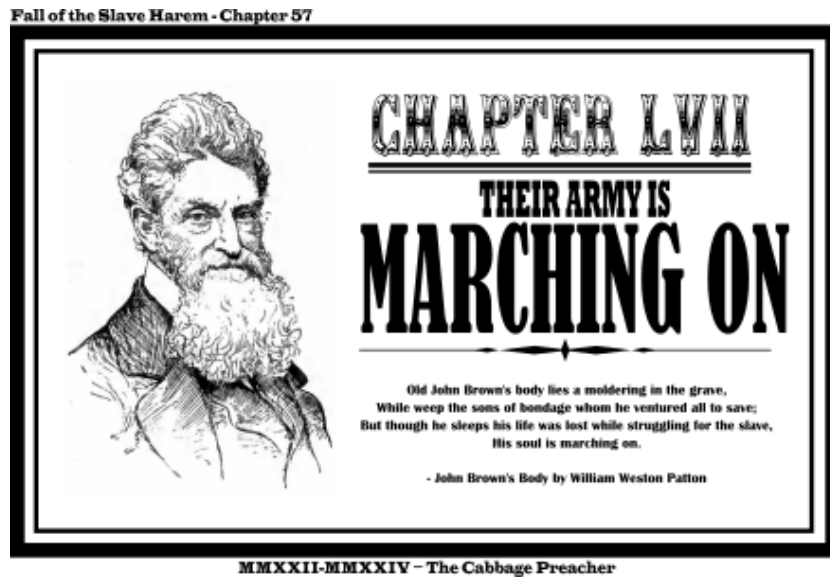
“This is a replacement pelt for your old one, that’s what’s the matter. I haven’t seen you with it for a long time.” After that, Ayomide couldn’t bring herself to refuse the pelt as the old man placed it in her one arm (the other one was still busy pinching her own nose). “Did you lose it during the battle?”

“I... lost it during a battle, yes. Thank you, old man.” Ayomide had been feeling a bit cold ever since she had donated her pelt to a good cause.

“Be more careful with those, we don’t have infinite resources. Being wasteful is a sin too, young lady, and you better keep that in mind.” Brown was about to give further lessons, though his lessons were not to be as one of the leatherworkers called out to him for help. “Be seeing you, young lady!” The old turned back and raced to help the freemen.

Ayomide was once again left alone with a stinking bear pelt on her hands. It’d be a while before she had the courage to actually put the thing on herself. So would the freemen have a while before they had the courage to leave the mountain, unless something big was to happen and stir up events on the flatlands...

Chapter 60: Chapter LVII – Their army is marching on.



41st of Summer, 5859 Earlywatch Estate, Outskirts of Casamonu

It was supposed to be a simple mission. March the retinue onward; apprehend the traitorous duke as ordered by Count Leon.

Seven days had passed since the beginning of his special military deployment however, and Sir Korvus had yet to see even a brief glimpse of the man he was supposed to be looking for. Korvus was a clever man, clever enough to smell something fishy from a mile away, but his pleas for tactical retreat had been denied by his liege. All he got was “How dare you call yourself a man when you cower away from a bunch of idiots in a mansion?” and replies akin to that written in a flowery, overly-polite language which managed to be more insulting than actual profanity.

Korvus could do nothing but wait now, resting his backside softly on the wool cushion which had been graciously carried all the way here by his retainers. His idle rest was interrupted by one of his retainers entering the tent “Sir, your steward has sent us a message. Apparently the Shinasi household in the village have been lagging behind in their taxes.”

“They have? As always, those revolting...” Korvus coughed to give himself pause before he ended up saying something overtly uncouth about his least favorite group of subjects. “I’ll deal with them properly when I return.”

“On that topic of that sir, when will you be making a return?” The retainer looked at the absurd scene outside the tent: a group of the finest soldiers in Gemeinplatz surrounding a mansion without making any attempts to attack.

“My plans were for a prompt return, but things haven’t turned out as planned.” Korvus took a look outside as well, the count’s soldiers looking as idle as him. “The count doesn’t want me to lose men if possible, so we’ve cut off the mansion’s water pipes and we’re waiting for the people inside to surrender any moment now.” To be truthful, he had been waiting for them to surrender “any moment now” for the last seven days.

“But sir, they should have exhausted all their water supplies by now.” The retainer wasn’t a military commander or a siege expert, but even he could see that a small mansion filled with a lot of soldiers should have been having issues by now.

“That’s what I have been thinking for a while.” Korvus tapped his foot impatiently. Really, what *was* taking them so long? “I called for some engineers in Casamonu, along with requesting a cannon from His Excellency. We should breach the walls today at least. I doubt they will hold much more after we start pounding them.”

“Understood, sir. One last thing, your opponent has moved their emperor to E2.”

Korvus had to pause to take the last sentence sink in. “My opponent has done what?”

“Chess sir. You were playing by post against a dwarven official who’s playing white. He claims that he can beat you even if he’s playing the smokecloud opening.”

“I know that it’s chess, you fool! I was just appalled at him using the infamous smokecloud opening in a serious match... Move my otherworlder to H4. What does that dwarf think he’s doing with me?!”

“Yes, sir.” The retainer left the tent, soon leaving the scene altogether on his horse. Sir Korvus wished he could just hop on a horse and return as well. Conducting his administration work through post wasn’t working out well. He had peasants to tax, retainers to train, feasts to attend. Being made fun of some puny dwarf through chess shouldn’t have been what’s worrying him at this moment.

Another retainer, this one armed, entered into the tent and saluted Sir Korvus. “Sir!”

“What is it now?” Sir Korvus had lost his nerves a bit after having been reminded of the mess he’d have to sort out after coming home.

“It’s nothing bad or trivial, sir!” replied the retainer in a hurried tone. “The cannons have arrived!”

“Cannons? Multiple?” Sir Korvus readied himself to jump off the cushion.

“Yes sir, two cannons, engineers and a geomancer to man them. His Excellency has been kind to us.” The retainer stepped aside to let his superior pass. “They’re currently outside, and are awaiting your orders sir.”

The commander finally jumped off of the cushion. “Excellent news!” He got his helmet on and fixed his hair up a bit while running outside. Sir Korvus’ armor clinked and clanged while he ran, alerting all the soldiers in the presence who had to take off their helmets and salute him. They had to stifle a laugh while watching the unathletic sixtysomething run across the field like a madman. The retainer guided him to a small group of people who had gathered around an even smaller pair of cannons. They all wore bright yellow vests, showing that they were men of the count of Casamonu.

The fanciest-looking engineer out of the group saluted Korvus, taking off his hat and lightly bowing down. “Sir Korvus, we’re ready to fire whenever you order us to. We’ve already been briefed on the situation. The cannons have already been sighted to fire at the mansion, sir.” He patted one of the cannons next to him, which stood on a wooden carriage meant to be dragged by horses. The cannon was quite small, being quite thin and around half the length of an adult man.



“Of course, there is no reason to delay any further.” Korvus looked at the massive tubes of bronze in front of him. He didn’t want to even begin imagining how expensive it must have been to cast these. They’d be quite expensive, even in a place with abundant copper like Casamonu.

The head engineer motioned Korvus to stand aside, and the rest of the men began dispersing from the front of the cannon. All of the men who operated the cannon had woolen muffs to protect their ears from the sound of the heavens splitting apart. The head engineer took out a muff and handed it over to Sir Korvus. Korvus wore it without hesitation. He knew how loud these machines of war could be.

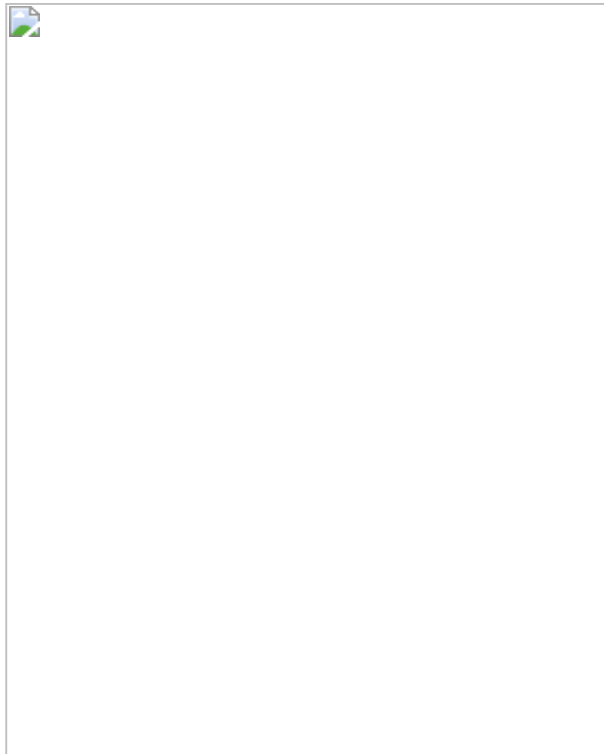
The head engineer turned to his crew. “Are you ready?” They all nodded and raised their thumbs up. “Begin loading then!”



The process of loading began with shoving the gunpowder inside the barrel. A gunner carried a bag of gunpowder into the opening of the cannon, leaving it there for another crew member to ram inside with a long rod. In the meanwhile, the geomancer brought by the team formed a larger roundish rock to be used as ammunition. Forming such a small formation of rock was pretty easy for a geomancer, though it'd quickly become tiring after a few volleys. The cannonball made out of rock was shoved inside the cannon as well along with some hay to pad and stabilize it. Lastly the time came for firing the cannon itself. Another gunner holding a stick with a burning hemp cord at the tip of it was responsible for this part. All the other gunners, a crew of 4, ran away from the cannon, closing their ears even if they had their muffs. All the soldiers near the cannon did the same upon seeing that the cannon was about to fire. The burning cord was inserted into a very small hole in the back of the cannon, making contact with the volatile bag of gunpowder which had been inserted before...

BOOM!

The heavens split in twain, and a great black cloud of dust suddenly covered the field from the two cannons firing simultaneously. Two great balls of stone, flying so quickly as to not be followable by the human eye, made quick contact with the walls of the mansion like a pyromancer's knife through butter. Castles and other fortifications would have thick stone walls packed with earth to protect against such an attack, yet the thin walls of the old mansion were not made with sieges in mind. The speeding balls cut through the bricks like a pyromancer's knife through butter, making its way to pommel the men behind the walls. Many men were injured or killed just with one stone making its way through them without stopping, the cannonballs jumping like a skipping stone on a lake before it came out of the other side of the mansion and landed on a field of wheat. Without giving their enemy a chance to recover, the gunners got to work on loading the next volley.



In the meanwhile, the men of Sir Korvus were not standing idle. He had concentrated his forces towards where the cannons had made a breach, the men preparing to assault the mansion after their defenses had been sufficiently weakened. Korvus didn't intend to give any quarter after Sir Baha hadn't surrendered after all this time. A few hand cannons went off from Korvus', the men inside

the mansion unable to retaliate against the superior range of firearms. None of these shots managed to make their way to their intended targets, there was no chance of that from this range with such inaccurate weaponry, but it didn't hurt to shoot in the general direction of your enemy.

Sir Korvus was watching the scene from the back, letting the men handle their business mostly on their own. A small smile had crept upon his face thinking about the fact that he wouldn't have to sit under that tiny tent anymore. He suddenly felt someone's finger tapping on his back. Turning around, he found the retainer he had sent away before for chess. Korvus had to take off his muffs to hear him in the cacophony of war.

The retainer could barely speak straight, and beads of sweat were flowing like a river from his ghostly face. "Sir! Sir, you must hear this! I was attacked by another army on the way to your estate!"

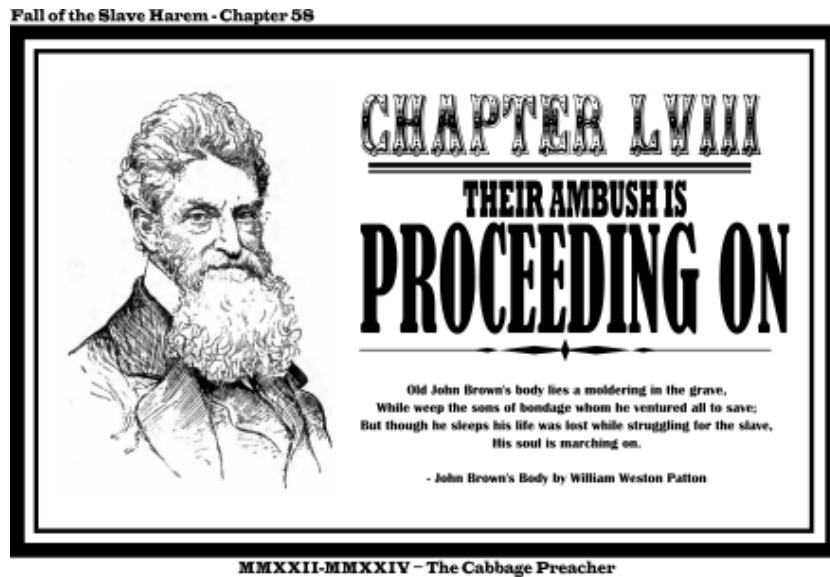
"W-Wha-" Korvus' surprise was interrupted by another volley of cannons firing. He almost fell to the ground from the noise, his head spinning and his ears ringing. "Argh!.." The retainer and Korvus threw around a round of profanity while recovering their senses.

"Ahem, what do you mean an enemy army?! How many?!" Korvus began asking questions with the speed of a running dragon on a flat plain. "Whose men are they?! Where are they coming from?!"

"Sir, some of them were wearing the colors of Sir Baha, while the rest wore the colors of various local lords in Casamonu. They were heading towards here, coming from the opposite side from right..." The retainer pointed towards a hill that sat on the opposite side from the breached wall. "...here?"

Sir Korvus could see, even with his bare eyes, flags and men on horseback standing on the hill. Reinforcements had arrived just in time... for Sir Baha.

Chapter 61: Chapter LVIII – Their ambush is proceeding on.



Bugles call, the drums rage... or they would if not for the fact that this was supposed to be an ambush. Anybody that had more than three brain cells could see that sounding bugles wasn't productive to covert operations.

Sir Baha was a man that had a couple more brain cells than three, and he had made preparations which amounted to more than not sounding bugles. He was clever enough to see that the blame would eventually fall upon him, the only person who had something to gain from informing the slaves. He was also clever enough to not sit like a duck and wait for his fate, for fate could be changed easily enough when enough palms were greased and enough men were pleased. Now he and a sizeable contingent, the exact number unknown due to how the men were so suddenly mustered. Atop his horse on the top of the hill he watched the men of the count who expected him to be in the mansion.

"They must be tired and frustrated." commented Sir Baha atop his high horse. His ever-faithful servant Ted was right next to him of course, listening to his liege's confident monologue. Baha had asked his servant to take notes well so that this battle could be later recorded into history. "Waiting to apprehend me, wasting days upon days... Alas, they have waited to no avail!" He had practiced speech ever since he had flown from the mansion. Most of his retainers found it cheesy, but they weren't exactly going to object to the guy who was their patron. Standing by silently, sometimes nodding sometimes cheering, was enough to please such lieges.

"Indeed, my lord." replied the old and somewhat reliable Ted "We shall march on to... to... Wait, what were we fighting for again?"

"...we found a good reason when we were planning. Didn't you take notes on that?"

Ted rummaged his pockets upon his liege's reply, finding a scrounged-up paper deep in the backs of his back pocket. "Umm... Against... Against the tyranny of Count Leon... Ahem, we shall march on to fight against the tyranny of Count Leon!" The men cheered upon realizing that this is the part they were supposed to cheer at.

“Take the part about us looking up notes out of the historical records, definitely scratch that part out.” Sir Baha cleared his throat, glad to have ensured his legacy. From an unknown petty lord in Casamonu, he’d become the brave warrior who fought against the tyranny of his lord who tried to arbitrarily arrest him! “Yes, against the tyranny of that slimy, perfidious, rapacious, darkskin-loving incompetent buffoon named Count Leon! Let us march forth!” The men cheered, for real this time as they were finally off to fight. Swords were raised, lances couched and stirrups secured as the men marched on once more.

Sir Korvus wasn’t standing idle while this all happened however. He had two guns, one on his right arm and the other on his left arm. Other than his biceps, he also had two cannons which were now pointed towards the charging men. Sir Baha had perhaps charged with a bit too much optimism; his cavalry was tightly packed together like pins in a bowling alley. The cannonballs made out of stone moved like a bowling balls, knocking the charging pins down with great force.

The horses which were left intact were scared, scattering wildly around the field. This left the inaccurate and slow-loading cannons quite useless, and the dismounted men of Sir Korvus hadn’t yet had the sufficient time to get into any sort of formation. A formation of sheer confusion and chaos was more efficient than no formation at all however, the chaotic cavalymen of Sir Baha somehow managed to make their way back to Sir Korvus’ men and swarm them.

Most of the dismounted men had left their lances with their horses as it was an unwieldy weapon to fight with, all they had left were their ranged weaponry or swords which were too short to fight against charging cavalry. Their expensive armor proved useless as men were simply trampled under the hooves of the panicked horses. It was a big mess of horses and men, anyone who was mounted attacking anyone who was dismounted. Confused men from Sir Baha attacked their comrades who had fallen from their horses, confused men from Sir Korvus thought those men were allies, and all in all everyone was confused as to what the hell was happening and who was winning or losing...

...or if any of the two sides were managing to do anything at all.

Eventually, the moshpit of soldiers began dispersing as tired and wounded men retreated. It was hard to identify each other while in the heat of battle, but all soldiers carried the colors of their lords who allowed for identification when one was calmer. Men of Sir Korvus and Sir Baha slowly condensed around their allies once more, both sides nonverbally agreeing to a truce. There were two lines of troops who opposed each other: Sir Korvus’ men were still stood closer to the Earlywatch estate while the men of Sir Baha were further away. A pile of the dead and gravely wounded stood between the two lines, screams and shouts sounding from this pile.

These two lines seemed to have an equal number of men in total, and both sides were unwilling to charge each other if not an as-of-yet unaccounted factor: the men in the mansion. They were battered, a bit thirsty, and most importantly, raring to get back at the gits who had been sieging them down for the last week. Opportune time had arrived now, and the men in the mansion poured out like air from a deflating balloon. Sir Baha joined them in the charge as well, sandwiching the men of Sir Korvus like a delicious meat-meat-and-meat sandwich meeting together

What was once certain victory for Sir Korvus had become certain victory for Sir Baha.

“Lay down your weapons, we surrender!” shouted out Sir Korvus. His men obliged in dropping their weapons and kneeling on the ground, which was the noble way to surrender in Gemeinplatz.

Sir Baha’s men halted as well upon receiving the surrender, for hurting nobility and their retainers after a surrender wasn’t an accepted move. Plus, ransoming these men would net Sir Baha a nice

sum of cash, so killing them would be a big financial loss.

“You have... fought well, sir.” Sir Korvus had to greet his new captor upon his approach. Being politely humble was a good idea when you were dealing with someone who now had a good reason to decouple your head from your shoulders. “We beg for your mercy.” He handed his sword over to Sir Baha in another traditional gesture of surrender.

“Yes, yes, I’ll be merciful and whatnot.” Sir Baha received the sword and immediately handed it over to Ted. This sword was to go to his collection and commemorate the day he had won a victory in battle. Such pride did he have in having done something for once in his life, something that was noteworthy anyways. His only significant accomplishment in life had been inheriting land at some point, which was a thing that countless people had managed to do in history.

Participating in a battle was a whole lot less common, a whole lot more prestigious, noteworthy even depending on the battle. Today would be a noteworthy day indeed, just not in the way that Sir Baha had intended.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

“It’s victory that’s so bitter yet... so mellow?’ Wait, how did that poem go again?”

“It’s victory that’s so bitter yet so sweet’, sir.”

“Yes, let’s go with that.”

The ever-faithful Ted was having an ever more faithful conversation with his master, making do with sweet poetry which was so purple it’d make the Roman emperors cry out in jealousy. They had seized Sir Korvus’ tent, along with his sword, and now they were seizing his ears as he had to watch the men write the most self-aggrandizing poetry that the land of Gemeinplatz had ever heard. Poetry that bad might have constituted a war crime if not for the fact that the concept of a war crime hadn’t been invented yet.

“Okay... I think we’ve got enough lines.” declared Sir Baha, leaning back at the cushion on which his enemy once lay. Hurting them physically was a big no, but hurting them psychologically was a big yes. “We’ll write much, much more once we’re at our destination.”

“We will indeed, sir.” Ted closed the small notebook he had been holding in his hand. Sir Baha wasn’t exactly rich enough to hire a professional writer for his memoirs, so poor Teddy would have to do for now. “What shall we write about?”

“Oh, how about the part where we baited the count’s men into a long siege? The part where we waited until they dragged out the cannons so we could take them for ourselves?” Sir Baha was practically bursting with sheer excitement “Many parts, Ted! Ready yourself to write about the descriptions of cannon fire during our next siege, maybe steal some descriptions if you’ve got any books containing them.”

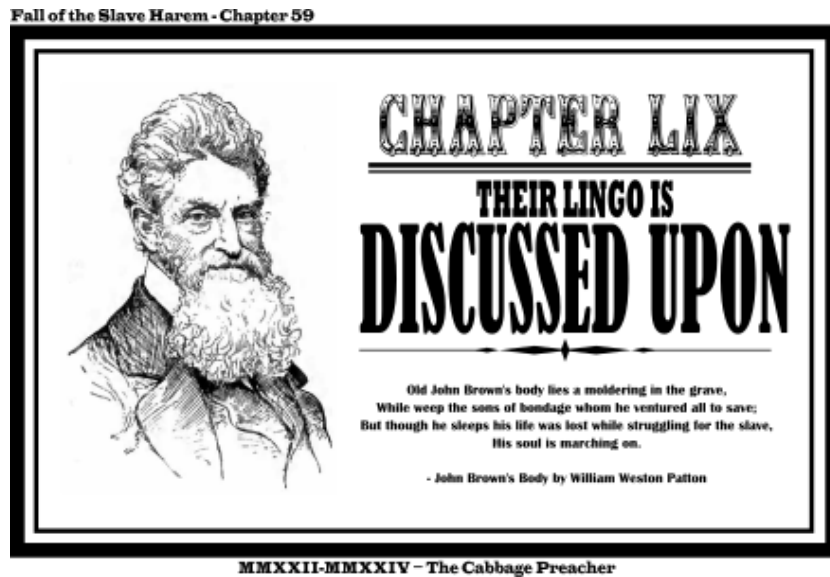
“A bronze beast, spewing the fires... of death? I’ll have to work on that one...”

“We’ve got a short journey ahead of us, Ted, better get your prose refined by then.”

“Yes, sir.”

The night marched on, the slightly grand machinations of a Sir Baha marching on to... who knows where. Sir Baha certainly didn't know where he was marching on to.

Chapter 62: Chapter LIX – Their lingo is discussed upon.



42nd of Summer, 5859
Outskirts of Libertycave, Mount Curry

“My legs, o’ my poor legs... O’ gods above and below bring me help...”

“Sir... Mister Watanabe, we’ve only done one round.”

Shinasi and Watanabe, the newly recruited otherworlder, were doing their rounds around the outskirts of Libertycave as they now usually did early in the morning. Compared to Shinasi, a robust bloke who had spent a lot of his time either working on the fields or adventuring, Watanabe looked like a twig who had put on a shirt and wig.

“Wait a second, I need a break.” said Watanabe, his bum making contact with the earth. He immediately regretted his decision upon realizing that the ground was, as one expected from such a rainy environment, wet. The poor man couldn’t reverse his poor decision however, and he had to gaze awkwardly towards Shinasi who was wondering just what the hell the otherworlder was doing. “Uhm... So, what’s with you referring to me as a ‘sir’? I don’t look much like nobility; I’d assume I look far from it.” Watanabe had to resort to small chat to preserve some sense of normalcy in this situation.

“You see sir- Ahem, mister, mister. You see Mr. Watanabe, it feels weird when I refer to one of your... kind with a familiar form of address.” replied Shinasi. It felt like he was walking on explosive eggshells while speaking to an otherworlder.

“You don’t seem to have problems speaking to old Brown, as far as I’ve seen.”

“That much is true, but the captain... How do I put it, he looks pretty similar to the people you find here. You... You...” Shinasi mumbled the same thing a couple more times with his finger spinning around on the air while thinking. “You know, you look very different along with some of the other otherworlders of your kind.”

“‘Other otherworlders of your kind’? Ooh. I get it...” Watanabe didn’t look to be all too pleased with this realization. “I guess I do look a bit different compared to you people, don’t I? From my perspective, the odd-looking ones are you all.”

“I’d say that people arriving from another world is a thing that’s even stranger than us living over here.” Shinasi planted his spear onto the earth before settling himself on a rock which was significantly less muddy, and most importantly, less damaging to the integrity of his pants. “Arriving here and bringing strange ideas like ‘ememoharpiji’...”

“Emu-emu-oo-arupijji? Em... If I remember my English classes correctly,” which, for the record, Watanabe would rarely remember his English classes “you’re spelling out the word M-M-O-R-P-G?”

“Yes! That word!” Shinasi suddenly lunged forward, turning his face squarely towards his comrade “I asked the old man about it, and he didn’t know it. Do you know what an ememoharpiji is?”

“He comes from a very different time as far as I can tell from our few encounters. No surprise that he can’t understand such a thing...” Watanabe took a pause to formulate a way to relate such a modern concept to such a pre-modern man. “So, do you know what a... *pasakon* is? Or a *konpyūta*?”

“No idea on pasakon... Kon... Are you talking about a *kompiüter*?” Shinasi’s face turned into a scathing scowl “Those damned... *things*.”

“‘Thing’?” Now it was Watanabe’s turn to be excited. “So, you’re talking about computers as a machine, not a person doing computation?”

“No, I detest computers, those tariff-levying tax-sniffing lax-working gits. I refuse to accept them as human.” Shinasi punched his fists together, as if he was crushing all computers under his grip.

“That’s not a nice thing to say, young man.” Shinasi and Watanabe turned in tandem to find John Brown watching them from the back.

“Captain!” Shinasi got up to salute Brown, but the old man motioned him to stand down and not bother with it. Brown had an unprocessed pelt hung around his shoulder; it was clear that he hadn’t planned to make a stop here.

“Do not salute mortal men, the only one who deserves such respect is the Lord. Even then, saluting the Lord like that would be a very odd form of worship.” He looked at Watanabe, who had suddenly gone silent from the surprise. “Do go on gentlemen, I only wish to listen in on the interesting conversation you were having.”

“Aa... Alright.” Watanabe’s nose wasn’t liking the odors it was receiving from the unprocessed pelt. He did his best to keep a straight face while talking. “I was about to tell Shinasi, moving on from his opinions on computing as a profession, that the type of computers I was talking about was very different.”

“Different computers? How could that be, young fellow?” Brown found himself a seat as well, sitting on the rock next to Shinasi. Clearly, he wasn’t here just to listen.

“So... Oh, how do I explain this to you?” Watanabe paused to take a deep breath, this being his seventh deep breath in the last ten minutes. “Okay, so imagine a machine. You know those, right?”

Imagine a machine that's so complex, it can solve mathematical equations just like- No, better than a computer. A machine that can compute better than a computer, that's a computer."

"A machine that can compute better than a computer is called a computer?" Shinasi felt his brain being fried from the word salad he had been faced with. "I think I kind of get the concept, but I don't get why they'd be called the same thing... Call it something sensical, like a 'computing press' or something."

"You could call it an 'electronic computer' to distinguish it, but nobody used that anymore since non-electronic computers were completely replaced."

"'Electronic'? These wondrous machines run on electricity?!" For a 19th-century man like Brown, electricity was still a pretty mystical force, one which was even the topic of contemporary science fiction (like in *Frankenstein*, published in 1818). He had seen telegraphs using electricity of course, along with arc lamps (incandescent light bulbs were a few decades away from him) used for lighting the streets. To think of electricity making machines capable of computation... That was a pretty wild thought, to say the least. "With devices like that, the second millennium should be a utopia!.. Is it? How was life for you?" Having seen Sir Jacob made him pause that thought on a utopic millennium.

"Oh, how should I put it..." *Should I disappoint this poor old man? I don't want to, but...* "...it's been awful, for me at least. Living from paycheck to paycheck, stuck in the smallest cubicles my boss could legally put in, with coworkers who thought their asses were the most precious in all of Japan, it was loads of fun. I'd have rather lived a century before... or, well, two centuries before as I don't want to end up in the Second World War, where one didn't have to deal with all this crap."

"Watch your tongue young man, spare that last profane word from us all who are currently living under the work of Providence." With his obligatory warning done, old Brown could return back on to their topic. "Nothing has changed, young man? Nothing at all?"

"Well, there are very fast trains that run on magnets."

"...and?"

"And... To be honest, I don't know history very well." Watanabe's knowledge of history was comprised of popular culture, as he himself was quickly finding out.

"Then, young man, how come you can claim that the days of old are better if you know them not?"

Having been owned by facts and logic (and, most important of all, John Brown himself), Watanabe was left without much speech in him. "Uhm... I don't know..."

"Young man, it is not prudent to speak of matters which you have no knowledge on." Having finished his obligatory round of lecturing, Brown leaned back on his "seat". "Do go on, on the topic of MMORPGs. That is a topic I wish to know more of."

Watanabe was happy to return to a topic which wouldn't make him look like an idiot. "Those? Well, as you might guess, people used these computation machines for entertainment."

"Entertainment? For who, enthusiasts of math?" Computation machines, for those not in the know like Shinasi, seemed far from amusing.

“No... Well, to be true, mathematics nerds loved computers too, but those people are not who I’m talking about. So, these computer things, they had monitors: screens which you can output elements graphically without having to draw anything yourself.” Shinasi was about to interrupt, but Watanabe shot him a glance that meant “I have more to talk about, be patient you fool”. “Ahem, so, you have a machine that can compute, and those computations can be turned into visuals on a monitor. You can string together these calculations and visuals to create games of sort into these devices, ones in which you play roles as characters. Then you can connect these computers on a line, hence the ‘online’ part, to play these games together. Connect enough computers together, and you have a massively multiplayer online roleplaying game.”

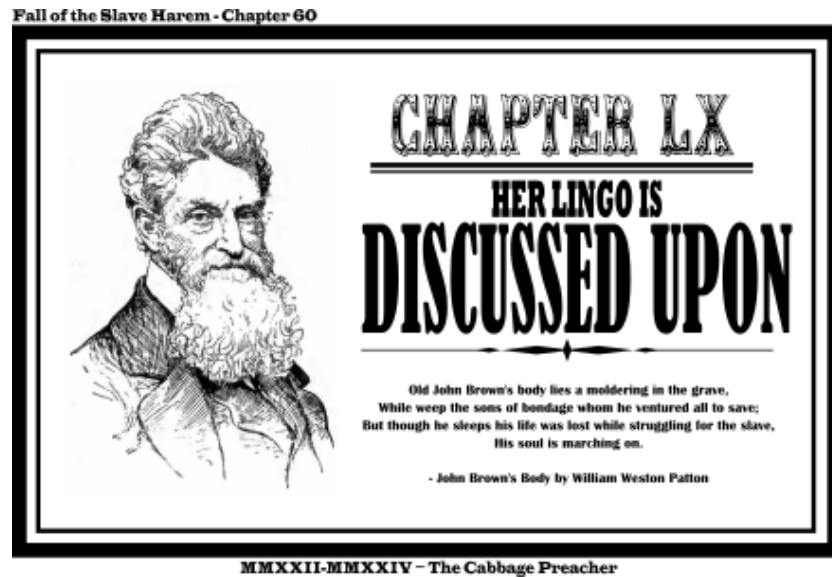
Having spent words which were clearly understandable to the modern reader, Watanabe had only done to confuse Shinasi and Brown more. Shinasi imagined a giant screen made out of magical gems shifting colors constantly to show 2D images of adventurers drawn in a very crude early medieval style. “Fire golems” and “water golems” were pretty popular tricks, where a skilled trick magician would shape the elements in the shape of a person for entertainment purposes. He had seen a few public performances of such tricks in festivals now and then, so such moving visuals weren’t too hard for him to imagine.

Brown imagined a massive screen comprised of arc lights which rapidly changed to draw visuals, this screen attached to a massive steam engine running to keep all the gears turning with workers operating levers to change the visuals. The machine had beads on the side, like an abacus, for storing all of the calculated data which the imaginary workers looked at to go on their operations. He imagined that one would have to be rich to afford owning such a machine and hiring all the workers to operate it just to play a simple game for entertainment; to think that enough people could afford it for it to become massively multiplayer... He felt like he had missed a lot with his premature death, yet Brown spared not one second to regretting his actions. If the Lord had sent him here, then he’d accept his fate and continue fighting the good fight.

“Honestly, I’m not sure I understood much from what he just talked about. However, there is one thing I’m sure of...” Shinasi’s behind departed with the rock, and his hands went for his spear. “... it’s that these mountains are not going to patrol themselves. If you’ll excuse me, captain.”

“You are excused, young man.” Brown stood up as well. “May God grant you a safe patrol route.” He went towards the direction of the tanneries, his business being far from finished. So was the business of Watanabe, whose legs ached once more as he followed Shinasi once more.

Chapter 63: Chapter LX – Her lingo is discussed upon.



“Adohe shelmiy Boczhe! Argh!”

Harriet Tubman had been resting and working on the map with Kyauta, until their work was interrupted by the frustrated grunts of another woman: Dr. Raban Rabanowicz Rabanow (or, more aptly, just “Dr. Rabanowicz”). Her voice echoed in the cave they were stationed at, which had transformed from Brown’s residence to something more resembling a military HQ.

Tubman and Kyauta looked at each other, silently debating if they should stick their noses in the business of the madwoman that they were stuck with. Ever since she had come here, which hadn’t been long, Rabanowicz had been doing the same thing: scribbling on her big notebook with a piece of charcoal, swinging a pendulum, planting a stick on the ground in different places and taking the measurements of its shadows, manipulating the beads of some abacus... Most of the freemen thought that she was doing some sort of black magic, but Rabanowicz insisted that she was “engaging in a healthy bout of natural philosophy”, whatever that meant.

Suddenly, Rabanowicz shouted again “Finally, it’s finished!”

Tubman had gotten too curious to be silent, so she couldn’t help but blurt out a “Get what, doctor?” in response.

“The planet we’re standing on is as heavy as around ten to the power of twenty-five Standard Cabbages.”

“...what?” said Harriet Tubman.

“And the gravitational acceleration is eighteen half-feet per second.”

“...what?” said Kyauta.

“Lastly, from all those, we can infer that this planet has an average density of around twenty point seven SC/f.”

“...what?” said John Brown, who had come to the room to talk to Tubman.

Rabanowicz has risen up from her seat in sheer excitement, and she was making rounds around the room while talking. Her once frustrated mood had totally disappeared to make way for pure joy. “The gravitational constant given in this book was very wrong all this time! I only noticed this after having had to calculate the gravitational constant of this planet we’re on instead of the one I come from.” She adjusted her glasses, a common sign of incoming intellectuality which no one in the room had any idea about. Her finger was in the air as if she was giving a lecture to an auditorium full of students. “Hence, I have managed to do what I set off years ago: calculate the mass of a planet without actually having to put an entire planet on a pair of scales. Something which nobody else has done ever before, as far as I know.” The room was silent, despite Rabanowicz apparently having achieved something grand.

“That’s... great, Doctor Rabanowicz.” Brown didn’t understand what the science folk said either, but he didn’t want to be rude by dismissing her. “So, could you inform us on how we could use this information for our cause?”

“Well, Mr. Brown... umm...” Rabanowicz’s smile slowly disappeared as she tilted her head downwards and downwards, her head supported by her hands or else it’d fall off. “...hmm. Hm?” She snapped her fingers after having something finally come to her mind. “Aha! Calculating gravity is pretty important if we’re going to use artillery! No?”

Brown didn’t seem all too impressed, or he was not impressed enough for his old face to clearly show it. “I do value the sciences doctor, but I’d prefer it if your effort was focused on matters more immediate to us.”

“I have notes on more immediate matters as well!” Rabanowicz flipped through her thick notebook, on a page that was filled with markings. She pushed her page full of notes right up to old Brown’s nose. “See?”

Brown took a step back to not have his nose be attacked by the overwhelming scent of musty pages. “I can see, yes, but I cannot read.”

“Oh. Excuse me, I have forgotten the fact that my writing is alien to the people of this realm. Ahem.” Rabanowicz began reading out the writing on her notebook. “Copper ore, half a bucket. Odd berries that the freemen found, one-and-a-half buckets. Odd berries that the freemen found except they’re green, zero buckets as it’s poisonous. Weird reed from the nearby lake, two buckets...” Her notebook seemed to contain a full list of every item in Libertycave. She had mostly compiled it to see if there was anything interesting that she could catalogue or experiment with, though by the end Rabanowicz’s curiosity had gotten her to note down everything regardless of how mundane it was.

“Now, doctor, this is the sort of things we expect in Libertycave.” Brown instinctively took the notebook into his own hand to read it himself, only to again realize that he couldn’t read Rabanowicz’s language. He let out a chuckle upon realizing his foolish mistake.

“Right, on this front... We have been focusing all on military and production and, thanks to the hidden hand of Providence, we have been doing good on those fronts indeed. However!” He looked around the room. The map was labeled in the languages of the otherworlders (English, Japanese, Chinese and Korean) written in various scripts. On the walls, there were markings of various shape and form denoting matters which was unknown to anyone but those who marked them. Rabanowicz was using a different system of writing, Watanabe was using a different system of

writing, Brown was using a different system of writing... Such a system of chaos wouldn't do for when they would be running an organization that encompassed a population larger than a bunch of people living around a cave.

Brown borrowed a piece of chalk from the floor and began writing down the numeral system he knew of: Western Arabic numerals. 0, 1, 2, 3...7, 8, 9. "Doctor, could I borrow that abacus?" Before Rabanowicz could go back to her abacus, Brown paused her again. "One second, doctor. If there's any freemen near the cave, call them all over here. Class will be beginning soon."

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

45th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

"*Cough, cough...* This place used to be so good before the old man filled it with chalk dust." said Ayomide, holding a fired clay tablet in her hand. Her other hand held a small piece of chalk, moving to try and copy the odd symbols written on the cave. It was nighttime, yet the cave was as bright as cave thanks to Ayomide having donated her gem for the purposes of using it as lighting. It could emanate a faint glow long enough to last the night if Ayomide imbued it with a pinch of magic.

Next to her was the old man in question, radical abolitionist and numerical teacher John Brown. He was watching the lesson to observe how the new teacher was doing. The old man, having schooled twenty children of his own, was used to having education of even such simple concepts as numerals to take long, which was the reason he had postponed education for so long. However, as Brown found out quickly, adults learned much quicker than children, and most men had learned how to write numbers in their one or two days of education.

There was a big difference in aptitude of course, people like Hakim and Rabanowicz had comprehended numerals in only one or two hours while some were still having trouble counting numbers up in order. Those who were left behind got tutored by the more experienced members, while the lessons in the cave went further. Now things had progressed on to arithmetic, and only three people in the cave knew how to notate it: Brown, Rabanowicz and Watanabe. Brown and Rabanowicz were busy with other duties, so Watanabe had been relieved of his patrol duty (which he couldn't even do well in the first place) and transferred over to education.

"Now, young lady, forget not that this is perhaps the most important front we're fighting on." Brown was happy to see people training for something other than war. "We'll not be achieving a complete victory unless we heighten ourselves through education."

"Yes, the amount of chalk built up on my lungs is already heightening." Ayomide coughed again. Her cattish senses were a tad bit too sensitive to such an environment. "I'm going to become made of chalk at this rate."

Brown however, his nose refined by years of smelling dung and processed leather, was as calm as he always was. "We could have a classroom under open skies, if you were to find us a suitable board for the great outdoors."

"...I'll get Bilal's folk to cook something up." Though, thinking about it further, Ayomide realized that having a lesson outdoors might be a bit hard under the rainy environment of Northern Gemeinplatz. "Maybe not. I prefer the cave of chalk to sitting under the rain."

“We’ll have a separate school building eventually. Ideally, it should be one of the first things we set up after a chapel.” The old man already had a whole town blessed by the Lord in his head. “The copperworkers have already moved on to experimenting with firing bricks, the last time I heard of them. There was one among them who worked in construction in Azdavay, she gave us instructions on how to make mortar based on slime.”

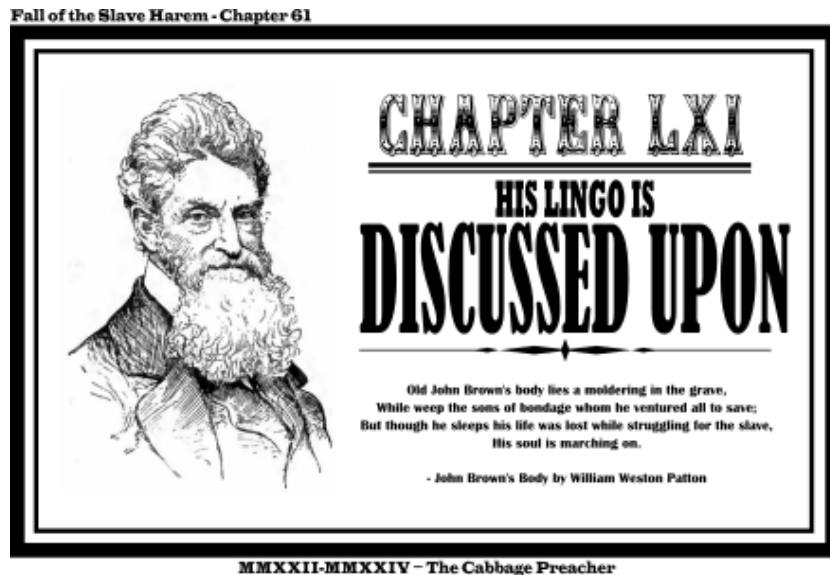
“We wouldn’t have anything if not for slime, those little blobs are the real ones we have to thank.” Having dried the bodies of many slimes, Ayomide muttered a silent prayer of her own to the fuel of abolitionism in Gemeinplatz.

“Indeed. Thank God for slime!” Brown quickly prayed to his Lord to thank Him for sending slime, and he made a mental note to mention slime at the next sermon he was going to give. “Truly, they are one of the greatest animals that the Our Father in Heaven sent down to this realm.”

I wouldn’t call a sentient sugary blob “the greatest”, but you do you, old man...

Thus, regardless of Ayomide’s unfavorable thoughts on sugary blobs, the day marched on with a load of arithmetic...

Chapter 64: Chapter LXI – His lingo is discussed upon.



45th of Summer, 5859
City of Casamonu, Casamonu

Today was a day, one which had gone unremarkably up until now for Count Leon. He had woken up, had breakfast, hadn't brushed his teeth because dental hygiene hadn't been invented yet, and sat in his office to await any news on the siege of the Earlywatch estate.

Oh, only if he had captured that traitorous scum by now! Leon counted on giving Baha leniency in sentencing in exchange for Baha giving him the details on where and how the fugitives operated. Then, instead of bothering to individually protect all the plantation owners angrily petitioning him, Leon would strike at the heart of darkness within Casamonu and finish this little insurrection once and for all.

Of course, things had gone a bit pear-shaped now, with there being no report yesterday from Sir Korvus. This wasn't unusual, there previously hadn't been any reports on days where nothing of import had happened, but Leon expected a letter of gratitude for the cannons at least. Had the men of Sir Baha somehow managed to stand firm against the metal beasts spewing fire towards them? It seemed so. Maybe Sir Korvus hadn't sent him a report out of feeling shame for his failure to break the mansion's defenses. *You're supposed to send reports especially when things are going bad, for Its' sake!* Sir Korvus was definitely going to receive a stern lecture from Leon when he got back.

Knock, knock! Count Leon didn't move an inch from his comfy position upon hearing the knock. He was leaning back on his sofa, boots lying on the table in a manner most unbecoming of a man of his stature. "Who is it?"

The voice behind the door was familiar to Count Leon. "Hilmi, sir. There's a dwarven lord who wants to see you. Should I let him in now?" It was that of his servant, ever faithful unlike his uppity vassals.

Dwarves were a whole another matter, a matter which the count would reluctantly have to deal with. *Those little hairy manlets...* Leon quickly fixed his posture on the sofa. "Let him in." He had

received a letter from the dwarves stating that they'd send a diplomat to discuss issues, but Leon had long forgotten it due to how preoccupied his head was from all the fugitive business happening. The count didn't remember for what the dwarf wanted to meet him either.

Before the dwarf came into the count's sight, he could already hear the dwarf's arrival from the clangs of heavy metal coming his way. Then came the dwarf themselves: encased in full steel, with a large warhammer strapped to their back. The dwarf immediately squinted their eyes upon entering the room "Could you close the curtains? My eyes aren't used to so much sunlight like you humans seem to like for some reason."

Count Leon's servant quickly got to closing the curtains for the dwarven diplomat. The count himself began with pleasantries. "It is very nice to meet you, Sir..." He realized that he had forgotten the dwarf's name.

"*Lady* Whitebeard." One could barely see the dwarf's brows furrow in anger through her flowing white hair. "Have you ever seen a dwarven man with such a well-groomed beard? I don't think so, those brutes wouldn't know what a brush is if one hit them right in their face."

"Please, do excuse me..." Leon added a couple more words of reluctant apology to make up for his mistake. Meanwhile, his nervous eyes were focused on the giant warhammer that the small dwarf was carrying on her.

Openly carrying around an implement of war into the presence of a noble was definitely not an acceptable practice in human etiquette. Thankfully, Hilmi had taken up the job of removing it from her. "Madame, your hammer-"

"What's up with my hammer? Everywhere I go they want to take it away. Let it be known that one does not simply separate a dwarf from her steel, unless it is taken from her cold dead hands!" Whitebeard quickly took a seat in the room, making herself comfortable despite being in the presence of someone which, technically, was her superior. "Do you have any beer?"

"N-No... We have wine, madame. Would you-"

"Of course not! Human wine tastes like piss. So does your beer, but at least it's a tastier flavor of piss."

Count Leon gazed up to the ceiling, trying to hide his annoyance. This is why he didn't like dwarves. Proud, standoffish, and without regard for nobility... A combination of all the traits he hated as a respectable member of high human society. He wondered how their society hadn't fallen into a society of barbaric anarchy with such disagreeable traits. *They are like the slightly more civilized cousins of the darkskins... Very slightly. A tiny little bit.* "I am quite curious as to why an esteemed dwarven gentlewoman would make her way here today."

"Esteemed? My term is running out in a week, and I wouldn't be surprised if I'm not reelected due to having spent a big chunk of my term by wasting my time wandering on the surface world." A few grumbles came from under Whitebeard's aptly white beard. "The reason why I had such a delay is also the reason why I have made my way here."

"Hm?" Leon was about to slam his head onto the desk the moment he realized the reason for the dwarf's visit. He had gotten tired of being asked about the fugitives by now, considering there was always some concerned git in his office yapping on about the "barbarians" coming to "end civilization" or something. Really, he didn't disagree with the fact that the fugitives were a menace

to society, but he also couldn't exactly easily exterminate such a vague threat. All he knew was that the fugitives had attacked a copper mine once, and now they had begun attacking plantations. He didn't know whether there was one group, two groups, or if all slaves had simultaneously caught a severe case of hysteria. Nor did he know whether they were a large group sending smaller parties, or a small group making surgical attacks every day, or whether they were led or funded by any of his political rivals. For all he knew, Leon was currently being targeted by a conspiracy of petty landowners looking to dethrone him by creating an excuse by themselves by letting their slaves escape.

Grand conspiracies aside however, Leon had a dwarf to deal with at the present moment. "You see, I had lots of time to check the temperature of the county on my journey. First it was the slave uprising in Azdavay, then I heard about a copper mine being burnt down, and by the time I approached the city here I've seen burnt down plantations with my own two eyes. Of course, while we dwarves are against the exploitation of labor, we are also against sticking our noses in other's business unlike you humans with your noses stuck everywhere."

I don't think you are tall enough for your nose to reach any business in the first place, added Leon while he was trying his best not to fall asleep while hearing to the same complaints he had heard from everyone else.

"However, as the Lord-Incumbent of Trade, my concern has to lie within the state of commerce between our realms. I know that humans, since they are so tall, have their brains higher up which means that you sometimes have trouble with blood reaching there. Still, I do hope your brain is working hard enough to see that travel, and trade, has become quite the chore. By the Ones Who Dwell Deep, I was basically extorted by the caravan masters! Do you know how expensive travel has become now that they are scared to go outside of city walls?"

Yes, Leon did know how terrible things were. Even if, at most, there were one or two plantations being burnt down now and then, the mass hysteria caused by the fugitives had done more than enough damage to the economy. Every day, every single damned day, his steward came in with reports of merchants withdrawing from the city, with reports of guild masters complaining about not getting any materials, with reports of adventurers coming back with nothing... What was the count supposed to do?!

"Yes, I do know how terrible things are. Even if the situation isn't as terrible as you've heard it, the rumor mill has been running on full speed."

By now, Leon had even heard that the peasants in the rural areas had begun forming their own militias in fear of the fugitives. Normally such a move was quite the threat to the order in his county, armed peasants were quite the revolting sight, and it was a threat that he'd have sent his own men to crush. Some of the local lords had done so with their own forces, some had let them be, and some lords were (unbeknownst to Leon) dead from the battle that had happened around the Earlywatch estate. Things were not okay, they definitely weren't.

"We are currently conducting a special military operation in order to find the base of the fugitives and end their terror once and for all."

"Oh, are you?" Whitebeard raised her brow. "How has that gone? I have visited a few of your vassals along the way, and it's not going the best from what I hear. The slaves are still escaping to who-knows-where."

"The operation is still ongoing."

“Indeed. The operation is still ongoing without much success. So has our business in Casamonu, and the dwarves will have to withdraw lest they incur great financial loss. I originally set off to observe the situation in Azdavay, but now I am here to warn you instead.”

Leon had enough. His fist came slamming down on his table. “And what am I supposed to do?!”

The dwarf shrugged. “I know not. Sticking my nose in your business isn’t my business. The copper from Mount Curry is very precious for us, and selling the copper to us is very precious for you. That is the extent of our relationship.” Whitebeard rose up from her seat. “Disappointing. I was at least hoping to taste a mug of your beer, but all I got was a mugful of disappointment.”

Leon sobered up upon seeing the dwarf stand up to leave “Wait-”

“Do not waste your time pleading with me. I’ll not have any authority on such matters in a week, the only thing you can do is pray to your deities that the next Lord of Trade has more patience. However, I doubt they will.” Whitebeard waved goodbye, closing the door behind her.

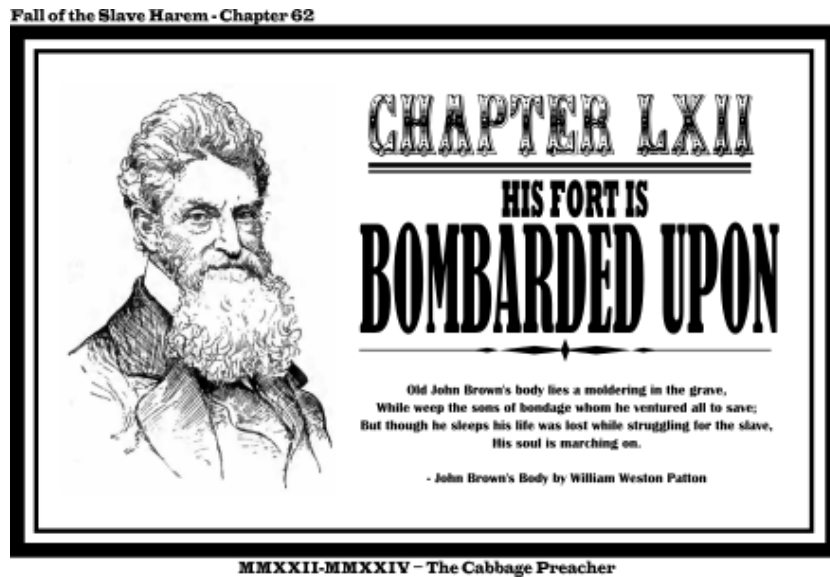
Count Leon froze in place for a while, unsure whether he should chase after the insolent dwarf. Still, he was too tired to do so. “Argh...” He finally put his chin on the table, his arms spreading out on the table in resignation. “Hilmi, do you know what just happened?”

Hilmi had completely zoned out during the conversation. “What, sir?”

“Of course you wouldn’t know... We just lost our biggest source of income. Get me something to drink.”

Much to the dismay of Count Leon, things were about to get worse. He heard another knock on the door.

Chapter 65: Chapter LXII – His fort is bombarded upon.



45th of Summer, 5859
Outskirts of Casamonu, Casamonu

...and the people who caused the knock on the door were standing outside the walls of Casamonu, ready to knock the entire wall down.

“Let us blow these walls and topple the tyranny of Count Leon!” shouted Sir Baha, on top his horse. His servant Ted was writing his speech down for future generations, while the rest of Baha’s men were long tired of the grandiose speech from their lord. It seemed like the siege would have been already over if not for the speeches before it.

The men breathed a sigh of relief as Sir Baha retreated from his high horse. With the pre-battle cutscene out of the way, the cannons could begin roaring once more, and roar they would at the walls in front of them.

★ FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM ★

45th of Summer, 5859
City of Casamonu, Casamonu

“What are you saying?!”

“Sir, I said that there is an army-”

“I got that the first time, you idiot!” roared Count Leon. He definitely hadn’t liked what the messenger had said. No messenger had brought him good news in the last month, in fact, and Leon had seriously considered executing all messengers in his realm just so that he could have some peace. “Where is that army?”

“Right outside-” **BOOM!**

The heavens split in twain once more, causing the room to go quiet. Then, looking out the window, Leon's trusty servant Hilmi shouted "The walls, sir!" and ended completing the messenger's sentence without knowing it. The count himself stayed quite on the outside, but he was stirring up a storm in the inside. That one cannon had, while failing to breach the walls, managed to breach his mental defenses. What the hell had happened? Had Sir Korvus joined the rebellion against him? Had the rebels captured the cannons? Were the fugitive slaves sometimes coming for him? Whatever it was, it hadn't served to improve Leon's day, and whoever they were had to be destroyed this instant. "Hilmi, get the men on the walls to counter-bombard them. We still have a few cannons in storage, don't we?"

"Yes, sir." Hilmi bowed down before rushing out the room. Now the count was all alone, all alone under siege of an enemy unknown...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

45th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Night had befallen Gemeinplatz once more, for the march of time was inevitable except for the cases of time being stopped by fancy vampires or elegant maids. The stars were out once more, in their full brightness thanks to a lack of artificial lighting up in the mountains.

John Brown, famously radical abolitionist and part-time pelt maker, had found it hard to sleep that night. His sleep was disturbed for no particular reason, only if such particular reasons as being stuck on a mountain and being stressed about being found out weren't taken into account. Faith in the Lord, of the guidance of the Holy Spirit, was of upmost import to old Brown yes, but the machinations of Providence were grand and enigmatic. Who knew whether the Lord would grant them success? Brown certainly didn't, and he could only pray that his death would serve the greater good at the least.

The old man's eyes were on the stars, shining as brightly and grandly as they had always shone on Earth. Such grand scenery was, to him, a testament in itself placed in the sky by the Maker. Oh, how insignificant mankind's struggles would seem if he was to look down on the planet from the stars! A realm full of flawed sinners, granted amnesty by His sacrifice and living on thanks to the unending grace and patience of the Heavenly Father. How great God's grace was that the entirety of the Earth and Gemeinplatz hadn't been consumed by the earth and sent directly to Hell! Brown pondered on such topics as always; the only thing he felt missing was the Good Book in his hands to read through once more.

Looking at the stars, Brown wondered something else: was Earth somewhere up there? He had no way of knowing, but he hoped that his old home wasn't too far away. Hopefully Mary Ann, his wife, was doing well. The old man was worried that pro-slavery folk could potentially harass her after his death, though all he could do from so far away was to pray to the Lord that she wouldn't be hurt. It was weird to think that, potentially, his family had conducted a funeral for him already while he was still marching on over here. Were his dear sons who had died in Harper's Ferry in a similar situation as well? One side of Brown wished that they had found peace in the afterlife rather than having to continue fighting even more, though another side of him wished that they would continue fighting the good fight.

No matter what had happened, Brown was quite alone. Even in Kansas he had his sons to accompany him. Now there was only Brown that John Brown knew of, and that one Brown was

very alone indeed. Stuck in a completely foreign land, with a foreign culture and foreign people... There was only General Tubman to accompany him, yet she herself was as busy as Brown. So alone was the old man, that he could do nothing but let his tears water the grass beneath him.

Old Brown honestly missed the United States, his home, his wife, his children... and union with them wouldn't come 'till he finally made it to the afterlife himself. Would he stop fighting and give up? Definitely not, but that determination alone didn't stop the pain of such a great separation.

"Old man? Are you okay?" The voice coming from behind belonged to one Ayomide, the first ever person Brown had met in Gemeinplatz.

Brown let out a great sniff, the sort of noise only old men can muster, to try and calm himself down. "Ah... Ahem. Excuse me, young lady, for you having seen me in such a sorry state."

Ayomide was barely visible in the dark, except for her eyes which shone brightly. "I've seen states that are much more sorry, old man. What's the matter?"

"Not much, young lady. It's just a bit of homesickness." Brown was busy with wiping his tears while talking. Such a scene was definitely the opposite of what Ayomide saw most of the time.

"Homesickness? Now that's something I can't relate to." Ayomide found a spot next to Brown. "Most of the folk here don't have the luxury of having that problem."

"I'd hope that Libertycave will become a home for all." Brown turned back to look at the settlement, completely in the dark to not attract any suspicion. "Even if we do have a long way to go from those mud huts."

"We're at least firing bricks now."

"That we are doing... I believe that, with the exceptional effort shown by the freemen, we'll be having a civilized arrangement of living soon enough."

Silence reigned for a while. Being stuck in a mountain didn't leave muchspace for interesting conversation topics. Brown and Ayomide gazed at the stars smiling to them from above.

"...How is it like having a family?" asked Ayomide, breaking the long silence.

Brown wasn't expecting to be hit with such a hard question, especially at such a late hour. The old man didn't budge for another while, thinking of an answer. "That... that... hmm..." How was he to answer such a vague question? Old John Brown decided to wing it with an answer. "You have a group of people who care about each other, care for each other, and love each other."

"Hm? Interesting. I thought it'd be something deeper." Ayomide's voice showed clear disappointment.

"I'd say all those are pretty deep and important matters, young lady. I did my best to be the best father that my family needed, and I pray that they were content with me."

"I'm sure they were." replied Ayomide, in one of the rare times where she wasn't being sarcastic. She thought Brown may have had a few screws loose with the whole Holy Spirit thing and whatnot. Nonetheless, Ayomide still respected old Brown greatly, for having saved her life and for having slain her former captor. "The people do care about each other, and care for each other here."

Love... I'm not sure I love everyone, but I wouldn't say I hate any of them. Does that make us a family?"

Brown hadn't exactly thought of matters in that perspective. "Hmm... I'd say so, young lady, all of mankind is one big family under the Lord."

Okay, maybe not that far... I don't want to be in a family that includes Jacob. Plus, it'd be pretty gross if I was in the same family as Shinasi... Still, Ayomide didn't feel so lonely at that moment. "Then, can I give you a hug?"

"Huh? Excuse me, young lady?" Brown was definitely not ready for that question.

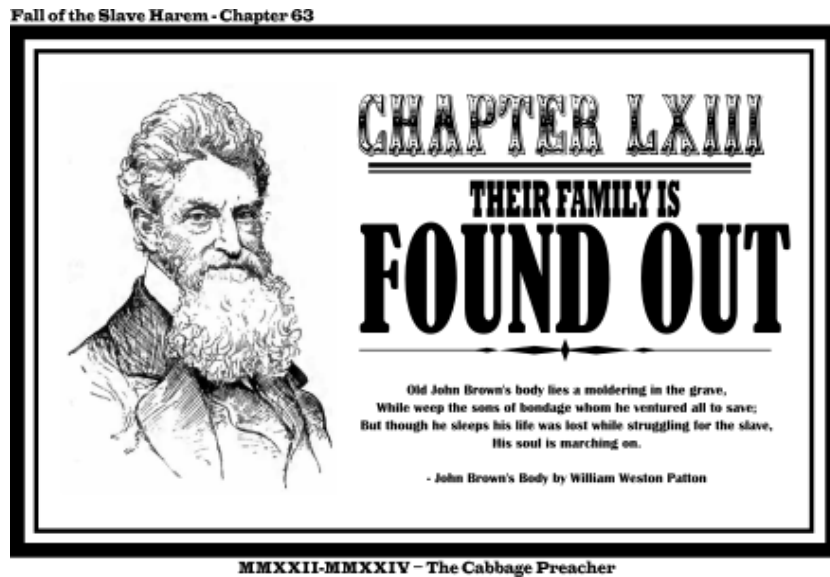
"You really look like you need one after all that crying." Ayomide opened her arms. "Come on, I won't bite."

Of course, due to a great difference in size between the two individuals, Ayomide was the one who ended up being embraced. "Old man you're suffocating m-" Another problem for Ayomide was the fact that her shoulders felt wet, and John Brown was wailing right next to her ears now. "O-Old man, why are you crying?"

"Excuse me, young lady- It's, it's just that I was reminded of my daughters when they were little... It's been a while..."

Thus Brown cried and wailed for a while, letting his emotions flow in the form of tears. The Lord had given him a new family, and by the Lord he'd protect them all to the death.

Chapter 66: Chapter LXIII – Their family is found out.



47th of Summer, 5859
Mount Curry, Casamonu

Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.
- Book of Proverbs, 16:18

Mount Curry is home to many a romantic scene, from rolling hills, to wandering adventurers, and to lovers making escapades of the kind which would cause the age rating of this work to go up if they were to mentioned in more detail. People engaging in coitus more ferarum à la canines aside, there was a pair who was currently busy engaging themselves with less amorous ventures out there in the mountains.

“It’s been twenty days, Tangerina...”

“Yes, and you have been complaining for the last fourteen days.”

The pair in question were a sight which may be familiar to the reader: a most edgy-looking black knight and a portly magician whose hat was still doing its best to scrape the sky. There was also another figure following them from behind, one of an overly edgy-looking hooded figure whose edginess had overflowed to sheer ridiculousness, which by definition would make them a trio. However, the figure at the back was only carrying their supplies, and they definitely weren’t going to be fighting with all that weight on his back. Hence a pair they stayed as they’d be the only ones worth mentioning in a tale of any sort, for who cares about the poor porters of heroes?

“You’re not the one cooking inside a black suit of armor in the summer heat!” complained the guy who was cooking inside a black suit of armor in the summer heat. “Plus, I haven’t gone travelling outside in a long time. My muscles haven’t warmed up yet.”

“I haven’t gone travelling outside in a long time, but do you see me complaining?” replied Tangerina. She most sassily shook her head, her tangerine hair whipping around like a crazed horse’s tail. “No, no you don’t.”

“I can *see* the fact that you haven’t gone outside in a long time.” He sighed and looked straight forward. “Ah, what happened to the beautiful Tangerina I met at my first arrival...”

“Nothing.” Tangerina shrugged much to the annoyance of her comrade. “It’s just that you have no taste, or respect...”

“Peh! Why should I respect anyone?” He extended his arms out in the grandiose fashion of a villain. “They should be respecting me, the one with the capital and the power.”

“At least you are honest. Especially with that black armor, it suits you.” Tangerina cast a bit of water and rained it down on herself to cool down. “Though, I wouldn’t be surprised if you died a virgin.”

“I can just pay someone to solve that problem.” replied he. “Unfortunately, I cannot pay someone to change the weather... urgh. I can’t breathe under this helmet.”

“You can just take off the helmet, Mister Edgelord.”

“You know what...” Mister Edgelord complied, plopping off the helmet which had been completely covering his face. “...I think I will. Everyone knows my ‘secret’ identity anyways.” Inside the helmet was a sight even more familiar to the reader: Kim Seong-min, CEO of Isegye Corporation and (un)retired adventurer. He had vowed to take business into his own hands: the business of eliminating the fugitives hampering trade in the region. What he was hoping for was to solve the issue before the next quarter, so that he could paint a brighter picture to his shareholders in the company. If the customer was always right, then the shareholder was something more than right (Kim himself failed to make a good metaphor there; his relationship with literature and writing started and ended with contributing to flamewars online).

“Sir, is it okay if I took off my hood as well? It’s quite hot for me as well.” said the figure who had been following in the back. Kim gave them a thumbs up, and Nirmal revealed himself to the reader. *I’d love to hide away in a treehouse somewhere and pass this summer away*, he thought. This dark elf missed his home, the concrete of Earth and the brick of Gemeinplatz wasn’t good for him despite the fact that he was living a decent enough life as the personal secretary of a CEO. “Thank you, sir.”

Kim didn’t really react to being thanked; his brain busy with being pissed off at the fugitives. “Tangerina, detect anything yet?”

“If I had, I’d inform you immediately so that we can stop this farce. The only living beings here are the grass and the wild beasts.” Tangerina was wagging her staff while holding it up to the air. From the outside, the staff looked like any other stick. From the inside, it *was* any other stick. She had sold her magic gear right after her retirement, so the best she could do was use the thick branch of a tree. Thankfully, Tangerina still had her overwhelming magic power to compensate for overwhelming lack of equipment. She could still detect every living being in a 100-meter radius without having to audibly cast a spell. “Oh! A person... and a herd of sheep - yep, that’s another shepherd.”

“Great, if we were looking to slay shepherds.” replied Kim, whose patience was running thinner than the wages he paid his workers. The only thing that they had slain were a bunch of weaponnappers who had tried to go against their overpowered party. Needless to say, there were no proper corpses left to mark where the beasts once stood.

“I sense another group... of three. No, four. Four. All of them are at a higher elevation.” Tangerina paused. She closed her eyes, focusing on the worthless stick in her hands. “They have stopped moving. Now they’re heading for the side of the road, and crouching. From the way their arms are positioned, I believe all of them are carrying weapons or tools of some sort. Maybe they plan on ambushing us?”

“Maybe. They are foolish if the plan on doing so; I’d guess that they may be hiding from the guy in black armor.” replied Kim, the guy in black armor. “Let’s head away from them and hide somewhere ourselves. Keep a close watch, Tangerina.” In rare moments like these, Kim did actually sound like a competent person instead of an online troll with way too much money.

Kim’s party walked away from the men they had detected, before throwing themselves behind a row of trees next to the road. Soon, their hunt would begin...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

47th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Donuts. Sugary, sweet, those are not at all related with what was happening at the moment... or so the unenlightened would think. For Ayomide, the ever-observant maid café worker turned radical abolitionist catgirl wizard wielding giant beams of multicolored light, the gathering in front of her was very much related to donuts. The donuts she’d one day rip out of the enslavers of Gemeinplatz who had deprived her of the right to have some. Donuts which... *why am I thinking about them again?!*

Ayomide sent a cold gust of wind towards her own face. That seemed to wake her up somewhat from the donut-related thoughts that surfaced whenever she saw the Provisional Council of Curry gather. The council had gathered once more, this time for a situation which had just occurred for the first time in Libertycave: crime.

“Men of the council... Calm down, calm down, for the Lord’s sake be at peace!” Old John Brown missed the days when he had a small crowd consisting of people numbering in two digits. Now there were around two hundred freemen, and organizing them all had become quite the chore, especially at times where debate was about to get heated. “Do you know why you all are here today?” A few murmurs indicating agreement emanated from the crowd. It was only a few, however, so the rest of the members of the audience had to be enlightened. “We are here to discuss the matters of a crime which occurred in Libertycave yesterday. Could the defendant please come forward? Defendant?” Brown had become all too familiar with legal terms thanks to his own case in court that led to his execution.

The donut suddenly became calm. One freeman raised his hand to speak “Captain, what is a ‘defendant’?”

Shinasi replied from the back “I think that’s a fancy term they use in courts... don’t worry about how I found out. It was just a misdemeanor, I swear.”

“...you are right, young man. What *is* a defendant?” Brown had forgotten the fact that he was dealing with people who didn’t even have a chance to go to court if they were accused. “A defendant is the one who has been sued by the plaintiff, the one accusing them of committing a crime.”

“I’m the defendant then?” A young boy came forward. It was Ejike, the former servant of Sir Algernon.

“And I’m the plaintiff?” Next to come forward was Bilal, the overseer of the kiln workers in Libertycave. “I’m not the one whose copper was stolen, but the kiln workers want me to represent them.”

“Yes, you two. Bilal, you can act as a prosecutor. Stand forwards please, and may I have order in the courtroom!” Brown didn’t have a gavel, so he used his spear to pommel the ground whenever needed. The freemen quietened down as he pounded the earth. “I also need... let’s say, six people to act as the jury, you will be judging the facts of the case.” After a short round of deliberation, six freemen stepped forward and took their seats on the couches taken from the Algernon estate.

Everybody could instinctively feel that the old man was to act as the judge, especially considering that his flowing white beard gave him a most judge-like appearance. He didn’t have any training, except for having been executed for treason in the United States, so Brown did his best to sound professional without any professionalism in the legal profession. The old man pommeled the ground a few more times to get everyone’s attention. “Ahem, ahem... We are gathered here today, may the Lord be our witness, to hear the case of the copperworkers and Mister Ejike. Mr. Bilal, could you give us the facts of the case?”

“Of course, Captain.” Having already broken the rules of the court already by not referring to the judge as “His Excellency” or whatever, Bilal continued. “It’s simple. After learning math, me and my men decided to track the inventory of our copper. What goes in, what goes out... It turned out that a lot more copper was going out of our stock than the copper going in to our furnaces. So, me and my men decided to launch an ambush against the copper thief, and we found Ejike approaching the pile of copper. We tried to stop him, but he took a rock from the ground instead and wounded one of my men before escaping.”

“Yes, I have seen the wounded man.” Brown turned to Ejike. The jury had gotten heated hearing thievery happen in Libertycave. “What say you in your defense, young man?”

“First off, I only happened to walk next to the copper pile at night, on my way to get something to eat for sis. I didn’t do anything to it; none of my hands ever touched a piece of copper.” replied Ejike. “I didn’t mean to hurt anyone either; I was just scared when I saw a group of men approach me in the dark.”

“Is that true, Mr. Bilal?” Brown’s piercing gaze slowly turned towards Bilal. “Did you see him reach for the pile?”

“No, no I didn’t, captain. Still! That doesn’t change the fact that one of my men were wounded by him.”

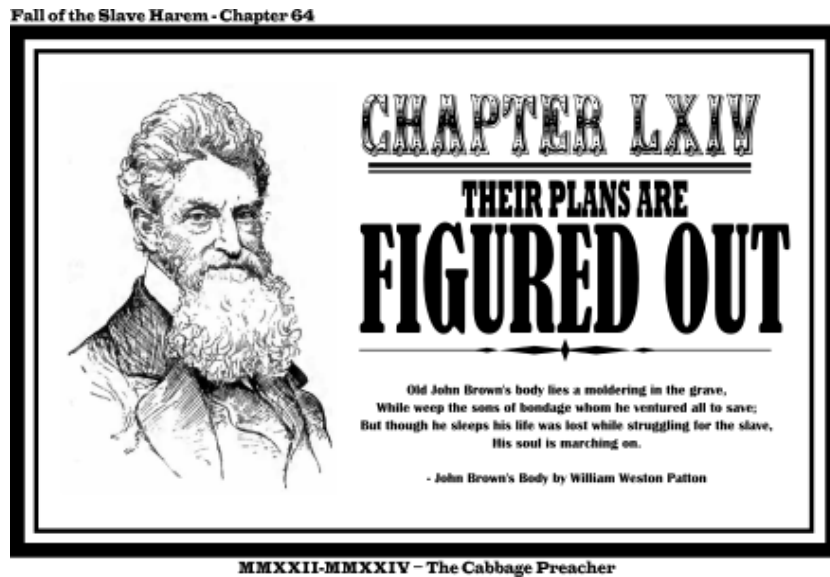
“Oh you-”

Brown pommeled the ground once more. “Gentlemen! Let’s act like the civilized men we are. I think we have heard everything there is involving arguments that aren’t needless arguing. I’ll leave the jury decide.”

After brief deliberation, so brief that it took as long as it took for this paragraph to be written, the jury ruled that Ejike was not guilty of theft, and that he had acted in self-defense. Thus, an

argument which would have taken several days and possibly escalated to cause a few more injuries was solved within minutes thanks to the rule of law.

Chapter 67: Chapter LXIV – Their plans are figured out.



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

48th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

There was some big news, so big that it had taken a while for it to walk up the mountain:

“Captain Brown, the county is at war!.. I think.”

John Brown, the captain in question, was sitting as he always did: in front of a desk with a map laid out on top of it. When the students were away, the cave returned to being the strategic command center of the League of Gileadites. It was always quite busy, with Brown in the center, Tubman sitting somewhere nearby and Ayomide standing next to them while trying her best to understand their odd conversations. Thankfully, the report as delivered above by Kyauta (who had barged into the room) was the sort of combination of sentences which Ayomide could easily understand. “At war?”

“Yes. I was making rounds Casamonu when I saw a big group of armed men march around the city.” The tired Kyauta found herself a seat, a newly manufactured wooden stool crafted with the finest copper nails Mount Curry could give. Ayomide quickly poured the tired woman a cup of tilia tea, which Kyauta obliged by drinking it all in one swing of the cup. “Thanks, Ayomide... As I was saying, armed men. Many of them were on horseback, and I saw them carrying many banners of various colors.”

“That’s definitely an army then.” replied Brown, thinking that the “many banners” must be military colors of some sort. In his youth (aged only 12, during the War of 1812) he had chanced upon a military camp and their many regimental banners. The experience had left the old man with a distaste for the military and its culture; a horde of drunken gamblers paid a regular salary to murder another horde of drunken gamblers... Or, more accurately, they were a group of man paid good money to kill their fellow man. A military wasn’t exactly the most Christian of organizations, as Brown had quickly noticed back then. He’d rather stay far away from organizing a professional army if he could, the Lord would surely lend victory to a force of well-organized militia fighting for Him.

“Whose army was it?” asked Tubman, a woman who had done much work as a scout and spy during the American Civil War. She knew that such banners were important in distinguishing regiments and other military units. “Anything that could help us identify?”

“Well... I retreated so quickly that I didn’t get to observe them much. I left as they began setting up a pair of big cannons around the walls. Such a large group of people are sure to have cavalry scouts, and it would have been bad if I was caught.” Kyauta paused a bit, before remembering a detail which seemed minor to her. “Oh! I remember that the men all wore yellow vests that looked like they were made out of silk. However, when I happened to get a closer look from on top of a tree, I noticed there was stitching clearly showing from these vests as if they had turned them inside out.”

“Yellow vests... Yellow vests...” Ayomide suddenly had a metaphorical flash of yellow light shine before her eyes. For others, however, they were flashed with actual light due to her accidentally releasing some light magic while thinking. “I remember! Didn’t the men at Casamonu wear those?”

Brown nodded as well, saying “Yes, I remember the men who raided us so rudely during our sleep wore those yellow vests too, and I believe those vests were made out of silk as pointed out by Miss Kyauta.”

“Then the vests must be a uniform of some sort for the count.” concluded Tubman, the others nodding to show their agreement. “But then, why’d they attack the count’s town? A mutiny? Rebellion? Civil war?”

“I don’t think there’s much ‘civil’ in that ‘war’ if it’s the count’s men.” Brown’s eyes shifted towards the map, particularly towards Casamonu. None of them were sure of what was exactly happening, but they were sure of one thing: “I presume that the count must be quite preoccupied with all the men swarming around his cozy seat of power.” He couldn’t help but let one chuckle out “O’, thank the Lord!”

“What is it, Captain?” Ayomide was wondering if the old man was finally going total bonkers “I don’t think there’s much that’s funny about this situation...”

“Ahem, excuse me...” Brown regained his usual composure, turning to address the small crowd around his desk. “Mine was a chuckle of relief, though I do agree it was rather unbecoming. You see, I think Providence has given a reward for our efforts through this auspicious event.”

“A reward...” murmured Tubman, thinking of what Brown may mean. “From what I can get, it seems that the count’s men turned on him. Men don’t turn each other unless they’re angry for some reason, so there must’ve been something that got them angry... Maybe it has something to with the fact the slaves who keep escaping in the middle of the night?”

“Having their slaves escape must be such a convenience which might be more than mild.” said Brown, mustering up his sarcasm. Not in excess however, for excess (even an excess of Brown-approved Christian-friendly purely pure puritan sarcasm) was a sin in and of itself as decreed by the Lord Himself. “I’ve seen, back in the United States and especially in Kansas, how slaveowners were quick to turn over and take up arms against any form of governance which failed to protect their interests.”

“Yes, I saw the greatest taking up in arms anyone’s ever seen.” Unlike Brown, Harriet had been on the front and backlines of (un)conventional mid-19th century warfare during the American Civil War. “A bit of paranoia, a sparkle of mistrust, and a whole keg of anxious gentleman...” She

quickly separated her clenched hands, making a fitting “*Pow!*” noise with her mouth as if the metaphorical keg had exploded. Ayomide looked at the woman, trying to decipher what that movement had. Having never seen a powderkeg, despite having witnessed a powderkeg go off, she wasn’t exactly well-suited to get the obvious metaphor which Tubman was going for.

“And that, that was the reward I’m talking about for, praise the Lord above, I believe we are witnessing the powderkeg go up in flames.” Despite having fulfilled his objectives however, Brown wasn’t exactly looking too joyful for one obvious reason: “May God have mercy on the souls which will abruptly depart from this land. Let us not forget that the blood of men is being spilled here.”

“Amen.” replied Tubman and Kyauta, the cave going silent for a brief moment of prayer. It was liberation, yes, and Brown saw nothing wrong with what they were doing in terms of morals. One day in 1837 he had declared “I pledge myself, with God’s help, that I will devote my life to increasing hostility toward slavery”, and increase hostilities he had even after his passing, intending to “break the jaws of the wicked and pluck the spoil out of his teeth”. Even in his jail, having a last meal with his wife before execution... Brown remembered what he had said in response to his wife Mary worrying about their children:

“Tell them their father died without a single regret for the course he has pursued - that he is satisfied that he is right in the eye of God and of all just men.”

However, Brown still saw the use of force as undesirable, a last resort for when no other methods were available, which the United States and Gemeinplatz lacked any other methods for peacefully abolishing slavery. Back in his younger days Brown had wanted to be an entrepreneur of sorts, gathering funds to advance the cause of abolitionism through ballots and not bullets. His naivete had been crushed under the heels of the Southern gentlemen who had only grown more tyrannical to counteract more peaceful methods of abolitionism. When evil left the righteous no alternative way but to fight, then he’d wield his (metaphorical) sword towards justice, and lead others who’d follow him to do the same. Not for vengeance against the slavers, not for any personal reasons, only in the name of righting what was clearly wrong.

“So, what do we do?” asked Ayomide, who had been left out of the loop (especially in the theological department). “The big man’s busy slaying his own men. That means peace for us, right?”

Brown put a somewhat reassuring hand on Ayomide’s shoulder. Then he proceeded to do the opposite of reassurance. “Oh, young lady, that just means we are getting started.” If he was back in the United States, he would have continued with the freeing of slaves up in the mountains and force the government to abolition. But, as stated in his speech in chapter XXIII (23), he wasn’t content with abolition of chattel slavery in Gemeinplatz. “The Empire must fall, and it won’t fall without us giving it a push.” Far from it, Brown would only be content with the abolition of all types of slavery. Serfdom, vassalage, all of it. “With the help of our Father, we shall kick the whole rotten structure down, and I know where to start!”

The room was energized, and slightly anxious, upon observing the sheer fervor and energy exhibited by Brown. His voice was ringing on the walls twice, thrice, quadruply even. He took the hands of everyone in the room, Tubman on one end and Ayomide plus Kyauta on the other. “I swear to all of you, may the Lord be my witness, that we shall soon expand our operations, for the end of liberating each and every last person in bonds whom resides in this realm.” He looked out of the cave, the cave in which it had all began once more. “Henceforth, I declare to all of ye who are

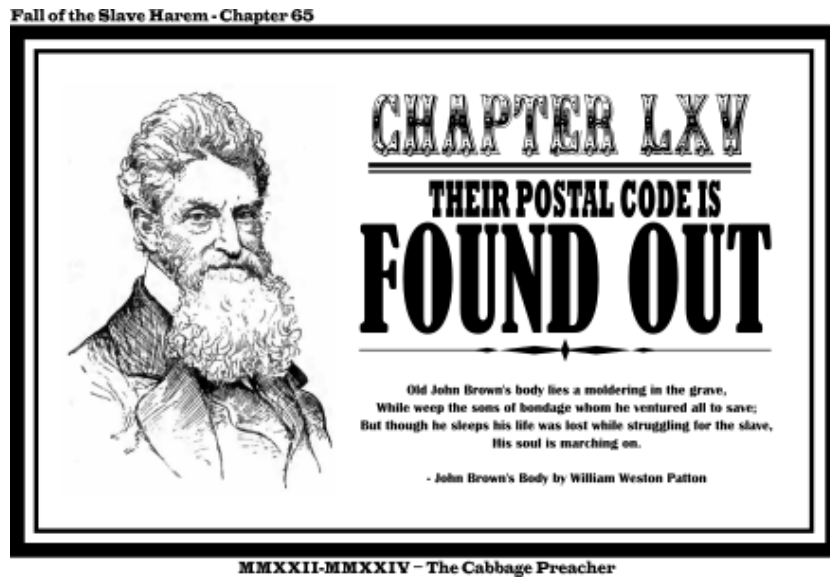
attending: Let us spring forth from these mountains, so that our grand gush forward shalt cleanse the sins of this land and make men free as the Lord hath made them in His image.”

“W-wait, where are we ‘gushing’ forward to?!” exclaimed Ayomide, who couldn’t help but be worried about the old man. He had a mad side to him; so mad was Brown that him dying hadn’t stopped him.

“To the closest town which we can liberate: Azdavay!”

Thus, the League of Gileadites was to launch a campaign of their own, unbeknownst to the lords bickering over Casamonu...

Chapter 68: Chapter LXV – Their postal code is found out.



49th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Libertycave was more alive than it had ever been, if the vague concept of a settlement could be alive in the first place. No longer would they be stuck on top of a mountain waiting for fate to do what fate does!

Soon Gemeinplatz would tremble in fear at the march of the oppressed, whenever the oppressed managed to sort their logistics out. It was easy to say “Let’s go and defeat them while they’re distracted”, but to gather an army strong enough to beat those who are distracted? To have two hundred people march a place which’s a day’s walk away and potentially siege said place? Think of trying to plan a gathering involving ten acquaintances, and multiply that by twenty to the power of ten squared by the root of -i to the pi of 3.12452435; trying to make any sense of the previous jumble of words is only marginally easier than trying to gather two hundred people together to do anything.

Those who couldn’t fight were busy with preparing supplies: non-perishable food such as hardtack, extra javelins, spare underwear... everything that one could need when sieging down a city. For those who were to fight, Brown was giving his crash course on siege tactics, Tubman was giving her crash course on stealth tactics, and Ayomide was giving her crash course on impaling people with a javelin. All three of these would be important in their operation, especially the last part involving sharp objects entering others’ bodies.

Today had been Brown’s day to train, and he had spent most of his time educating the freemen on the usage of ladders for their upcoming operation. With his training time over, the old man had intended to make his way to the cave when...

“Captain!” It was a familiar voice, that of Ayomide running towards Brown. “We have... we have something!”

Brown waited until Ayomide stopped, took a few breaths, and calmed down. “Young lady, do you take me for a mind reader of some sort? What is that ‘something’ that you talk of?”

“It’s... it’s...” Ayomide opened her arms, pointing her hands forwards towards Brown. “...a wooden object that’s as long as this. There’s a metal tube stuck inside of it.”

“A wooden object with a metal tube inside...” Brown didn’t need to think long despite the vague description not helping him at all. “Young lady, that sounds like a firearm.”

“It doesn’t look like any firearm that I know of.” For Ayomide, a firearm could be described as “a wooden shaft with a long metal tube stuck at the end of it”.

No matter what the nature of this object was, Brown was curious. “Take me to it, young lady.” With that, Brown and Ayomide walked for only a minute before they encountered a curious crowd who had gathered around a small wooden crate flanked by an even smaller crate. A pair of barrels poked out from the crate, two metal barrels that looked out of this world in terms of manufacturing quality.

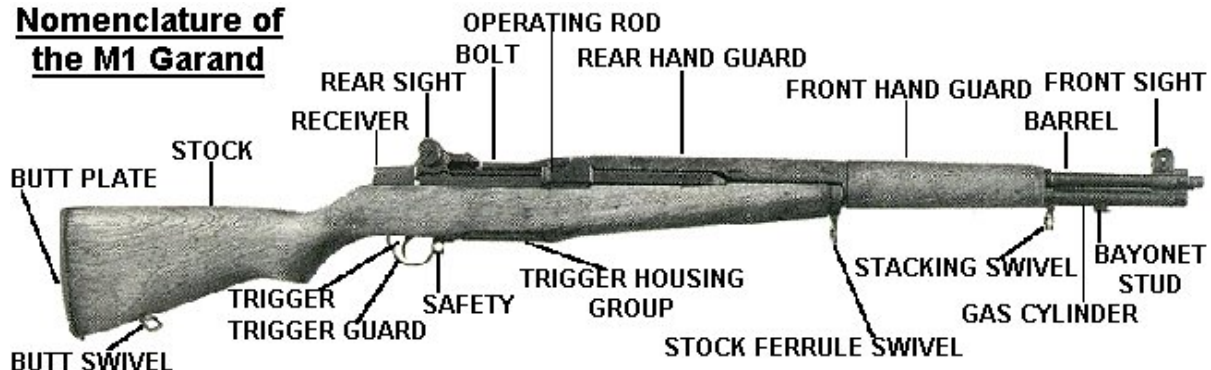
“Excuse me sir, excuse me lady...” Brown cut through the crowd, slowly making his way to the center of the human donut (unlike Ayomide, Brown didn’t get distracted by the thought of actual donuts). In the middle he found a pair that wasn’t a pair of barrels: Rabanowicz and Watanabe. Watanabe was shaking a bit, and Brown saw that he didn’t look too comfortable being near firearms. Rabanowicz was trying to peek inside the barrel-

“Miss Rabanowicz!” shouted Brown all too suddenly, swiftly confiscating the odd firearm from the curious woman. “That’s the business end of the rifle, you shouldn’t be looking through it!”

“W-What?!” Rabanowicz didn’t seem all too pleased to have her object of curiosity be taken away so suddenly. “This musket is missing a firing mechanism. Look,” She pointed towards the back of the rifle “there’s no match or wheel here to fire the gunpowder up. I’ve observed it to be totally safe.”

“Matches and wheels are not the only way to fire a firearm, Miss Rabanowicz.” replied Brown. Still, taking a second look, he noticed that the weapon lacked a flintlock or a percussion lock which would be familiar to Brown. It was obviously some sort of rifle, a carbine perhaps due to how short it was according to Brown’s 19th century standards where the average rifle would barely fit through a door.

Nomenclature of the M1 Garand



On a metal part toward the back (the “receiver” as one might know of it), Brown found an English inscription stating “U.S. RIFLE / CAL. 30M1 / SPRINGFIELD ARMORY / 2656151”, which

confirmed the fact that this was indeed a rifle. An American rifle at that, one produced in the Springfield Armory. Brown wondered how it had gotten here; an American rifle being transported to *Gemeinplatz* was no less mysterious than an American man being transported to it.

The old man examined the alien rifle, trying to figure out how its firing mechanism worked while the onlookers watched him. He pulled and pushed on the various parts, his first futile attempt being to try pulling on the trigger guard as if he was operating a lever-action rifle, keeping the barrel pointed towards the ground so that he wouldn't end up shooting any bystanders. Eventually he lucked upon the operating rod and Brown managed to open what he thought was the breech of the rifle. However, compared to the Beecher's Bibles (a.k.a. the Sharps rifle) which he was familiar with, this breech still looked alien. There was no place to put a percussion cap, or any mechanism on the outside to activate the percussion cap, nor was there a place for a paper cartridge to go in. "What sort of cartridge would go in this?" he wondered audibly.

His wonderment received a reply from Watanabe. "Cartridge? Like, a bullet?" The otherworlder pointed at the smaller crate that hadn't caught Brown's attention yet. "I think these are bullets."

"They are?" Brown checked on the crate, and saw that there was a whole lot of small brass-colored tubes that were packed together by metal bands. They looked cartridge-shaped to him, though why someone would waste brass on such a thing was beyond Brown. "What sort of cartridge is this?"



Watanabe shrugged. "I don't know. I've only seen guns in movies and games, never used a gun myself." Drawing from his miniscule experience in World War II media, he continued "I'm pretty sure you're supposed to ram that whole thing in the gun to reload it."

Brown debated for a second whether shoving objects inside a firearm was a good idea, but he decided that it was better to try Watanabe's suggestion. What good would be a gun if there was no way to reload it? The old man pushed the clip inside the rifle and, voila, it fit inside the magazine like hand in glove. Brown pushed the operating rod forward and closed the bolt, shouting "Stand back and shield your ears!" before pulling the trigger...

Click.

A disappointing load of nothing. "Huh..." Brown played around with the gun a bit more before finally finding the safety catch. The old man let out a final "Alright, shield your ears!" before pulling the trigger again.

BANG!

The sound of a loud explosion, an explosion that had created much less smoke than Brown expected from gunfire. Some of the freemen instinctively jumped away or dropped on the floor, not expecting such a noise; there were those among them who had never seen a firearm before. To Brown's surprise, he saw the bullet he just fired jump out the gun and drop on to the floor. Out of curiosity he pulled the trigger again.

BANG!

The rifle fired again, much to Brown's surprise. He had seen repeaters, guns with the ability to carry more than one cartridge, but the repeaters of his time all had to be manually operated to reload the ammunition with each shot. This gun had seemingly reloaded itself without Brown's intervention.

"What hath God wrought..." mumbled Brown, unable to keep himself calm when being faced with such technology. How had this come here in the first place? The rifle in his hands was way beyond the technology of Gemeinplatz, not to mention beyond the technology of Brown's time. The old man couldn't discount a miracle or divine intervention, though Providence usually worked in ways way subtler than "drop a shipment of rifles and let Brown figure it out".

"Hmm... Oh! What's this?" Rabanowicz had been unable to keep herself from trying to pick the second rifle up after seeing the first perform in Brown's hands. However, she had uncovered something upon emptying the crate. "There's a paper at the bottom." She lifted the paper in question up for all to see.

The paper itself was as alien as the rifles: a pearl-white page with letters "written" cleanly in four languages (English, Chinese, Japanese and Korean). Watanabe recognized the familiar Calibri font used in modern computers, and the message on the paper was clearly printed through a printer. Brown read the contents of the paper aloud for all to hear:

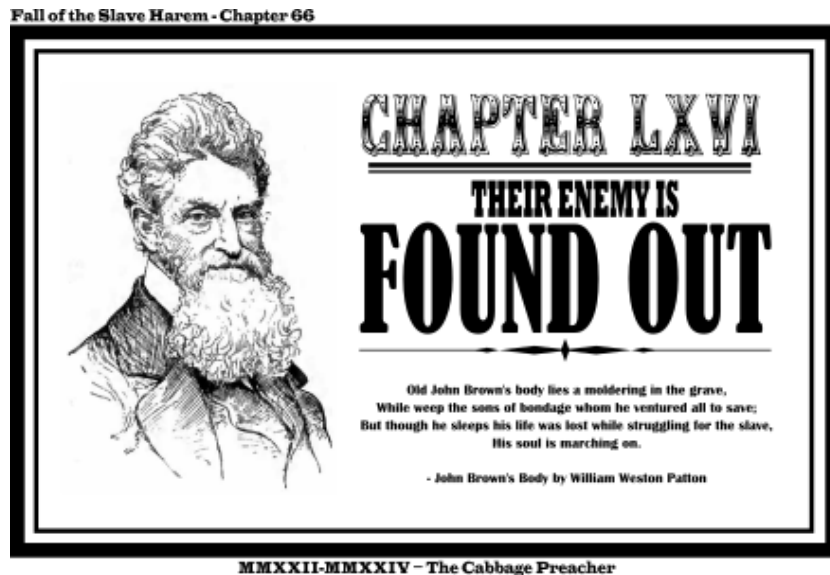
This is a gift from a friend. I have included visual instructions on the back of this paper on how to use this gift.

Kim will come soon donned in black armor, do not trust him. His only concern is with using you for further his wealth. I shall meet you when he is defeated.

May the countless leaves of the forest bless you.

— Nirmal of Chanakburg

Chapter 69: Chapter LXVI – Their enemy is found out.



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

49th of Summer, 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Today, like any other day, a scene which had recently become common up in old Mount Curry took place once more for the final time: a black knight and a tangerine witch making their rounds around the place.

“Are we there yet?” protested Tangerina, whose knees were protesting against being forced to walk up the mountain once more.

“Does it look like we’re there yet?!” Kim had taken off his helmet, though it was hard to decide whether he wanted to have his head fried with or without a tin can on his head. The summers in Northern Gemeinplatz were hot and humid, not suitable for LARPing as a knight in full black-colored plate. The otherworlder cursed himself for having chosen such an inconvenient alter-ego back in his adventuring phase; curses be to ye olde days of his edgy teenhood! Thankfully he had learned to substitute that emptiness in his soul, an emptiness where compassion and basic empathy should be, with loads of money instead of edgy antics. “You should know we’re close when you feel loads of people nearby.”

“I’ve felt a couple of people with my scan. They ran away immediately though; the fugitives must have scouts stationed in the mountains...” Tangerina immediately stopped, her face scrunching up. “Ow... Okay, I just detected a load of people. That hurt...”

“It’s time then.” Kim put his helmet on once more, his own face scrunching up the moment he smelt its insides. “Urgh, I should get Nirmal to clean this helmet once I get home.”

“...are secretaries supposed to wash their boss’ helmet?” Tangerina didn’t question further though, for her job definitely didn’t include questioning people. Her job did include climbing however, and climb up a cliff towards the fugitive camp they (painfully) did.

Once at the top, Kim saw a scene which wasn't all too new to him. He had already seen Libertycave from far away before, and the mud (plus the occasional brick) huts didn't look all too impressive from this closely either. What was a new sight was a formation of men ready to face him, all armed with sharp spears and even sharper intent. The first line of men were crouched down with long spears, long enough that they may even be classified as pikes, pointing forwards while the second line behind them held spear throwers which had shorter spears readied in them.

It'd be a lie to say that Kim didn't feel nervous staring at such a large formation of men. Feeling nervous when overwhelmed by large numbers is the most natural of instincts after all. However, he kept his cool: Kim knew that he could take all of them on if need be. "Alright gentlemen... and ladies, please lower your spears. I've come here to talk, not fight. Don't worry, I'm on your side."

Being referred to as "gentlemen" by Kim had already done wonders. Some spears were lowered, while the freemen began speaking amongst themselves, while some were still suspicious of the otherworlder for being an otherworlder. Sure, the black armor looked menacing, but it would have been foolish to judge a book by the cover or a Kim by his armor. There was someone who definitely hadn't been tempted, however. "That is all good, but I'd like to approach this with due diligence." Out came John Brown from the middle, flanked by a rifle-wielding Harriet Tubman and a gem-wielding Ayomide No-surname-as-of-yet. Brown was amongst the tallest in the crowd; his height combined with the semi-automatic rifle he wielded made him quite the intimidating figure, or it would have if he wasn't hiding the rifle from the direct sight of Kim. This trio were all hiding their weapons behind their backs, to not reveal their trump cards from the start.

Despite being tall, Brown hadn't managed to get a good look at his opponent from the back. Now that he did however... "Hm? You're familiar. Didn't we meet back in Casamonu? And, that hat of the lady next to you is simply a design which none would never forget."

"*Migugin!*" Kim too was surprised with this chance encounter. "*This was last place I expect American!*" He confused everyone except Brown and Tubman by speaking "gibberish", more commonly known as "English". The freemen were a bit confused at the fact that they were witnessing an ostensibly amicable conversation instead of fierce battle.

"I see. He must be the Mr. Kim that the letter mentioned." said Brown in a volume only heard by those next to him. Then he continued with a shout towards Kim "Then, do let us know of why you're here."

"A- As I said, to help your revolution against the Empire of Gemeinplatz." Kim took out a wooden stick crowned with a steel tube. It looked to be all new and crafted with an otherworldly level of craftsmanship. "I have these hand cannons set for production, ready to go." Getting a prototype ready so quickly had been quite the challenge for Kim, from the design to the production to making sure it doesn't violate any international treaties... "I only have one request, though calling it a request would be wrong since this would be of benefit to you all as well."

Brown had the sneaking suspicion that Kim's deal would be too good to be true. "What would that be?"

"It's simple, really. I have many more gifts to bestow upon you, I have grand plans for Gemeinplatz as a whole." His helmet hid it all, but one could practically feel the smile creeping upon Kim's face. "If I am to provide you patronage, then I'd like to be the one who leads you as well. The one who leads Gemeinplatz into a new future, and you into freedom."

Thus it was, Kim's plan that he had cooked up during a [insert brand of energy drink]-fueled session of planning. The Empire was bad for business, with all the tariffs, the annoying guilds and the snobby feudal lords... Chattel slavery too, that was bad for business; Kim preferred underpaid workers to slaves. At least the former held onto an illusion of freedom he could exploit. Back home in Korea, workers would rather end themselves rather than end the system exploiting them. They'd vote for the people exploiting them as long as they were promised some vague enemy to deal with. Wouldn't it have been more convenient if Kim was to lead a movement of abolition and be the one who got to restructure *Gemeinplatz* in such a manner with him being on top? Get himself to be king, president, whatever, and get all the newly-freed slaves working for him in gratitude... They probably wouldn't care about the work as long as their lives had improved by the littlest bit.

No matter how greatly Kim thought of himself however, the freemen didn't look all too eager to be led by some strange otherworlder. Sure, Brown fit that description as well, but he was the strange otherworlder who was actively fighting for them. Plus, Brown hadn't actually bothered to officially declare himself as a leader yet, and much of the day-to-day decision making was made by the freemen themselves without any intervention from Captain Brown. This foreign man in black armor didn't inspire much trust in anyone. "That isn't my decision to make. If the fine folk here want to follow you, then I have nothing that I can do or say." Looking at the cynical expressions on the faces of the freemen made it clear that they weren't going to follow Kim anywhere. "It seems that we won't be reaching an agreement."

"Really?" Kim took off his helmet to look at everyone face-to-face. "Look at me. I'll lead you to victory. I cannot lead you anywhere if I'm not your leader."

Suddenly a shocked voice from the back cried out. "Wait, are you *that* Kim?!" It was Watanabe, who had seen a semi-familiar face pop out from under the helmet. "I remember seeing you on the news, 'the genius youth from South Korea who became a millionaire overnight with cryptocurrency'!"

The crowd was shocked. What the hell was a "cryptocurrency", and why did Watanabe know about this guy? "I had invested in your bloody crypto exchange before I died! Do you know how much that cost me?!" Watanabe threw a rock at Kim, who dodged the low-level rock easily. "You were somehow worse than Sam Bankman-Fried, you scamming bast-"

Watanabe's angry rant was cut short by a swift wave of water, coming from the direction of Tangerina, sweeping him off his feet and face first into a puddle of mud. Still, he didn't stop. The errant otherworlder and former crypto investor pulled his face out of the mud and continued, "This guy isn't going to be leading us anywhere but failure." He picked up and threw another rock towards Kim, who dodged the low-level rock once more. "Piss off and go drown in your bathtub full of cash!"

Before Kim could attempt to refute anything coming from Watanabe, the wall of freemen had already had enough. Watanabe's rocks were joined with a couple javelins flying towards Kim, who had the slightest bit harder of a time dodging the mid-level javelins. Though they didn't get what "crypto" was, the freemen got the fact that they didn't want to be ruled by otherworlders anymore; Watanabe's protest had only given them the boldness they needed to start throwing the javelins. However, despite how angrily they threw their javelins, all of their weaponry either bounced off of Kim's plate or Kim dodged the incoming projectiles with superhuman swiftness.

A couple volleys later, Kim and Tangerina were standing amidst a field of thrown javelins without any wounds inflicted on them. Kim, who had put his helmet back on during the rain of javelins, let

out a muffled laugh. “Alright, I gave you a deal. You refused, so I have no choice now.” He turned to the magician standing next to him. “Tangerina! Let us exterminate them, Tangerina.” At least he could get kudos for having wiped out the fugitives if his first plan hadn’t worked out.

Tangerina raised her staff up, and a great cloud of water vapor began being sucked into it from the humid environment. This water trickled down from the staff to the ground, where it quickly rose up to create another wave akin to the one which had swept Watanabe. This one was much larger however; large enough to sweep everyone standing in formation. It rushed forth, this great wave, and everyone in the formation braced themselves for impact.

This bracing was for naught however, as this wave of water was dissolved with a wave of wind blowing from the opposite direction. It was Ayomide, who had revealed the shining green gem which had been resting in her hands, and cast a strong gust of wind to counter the rushing water.

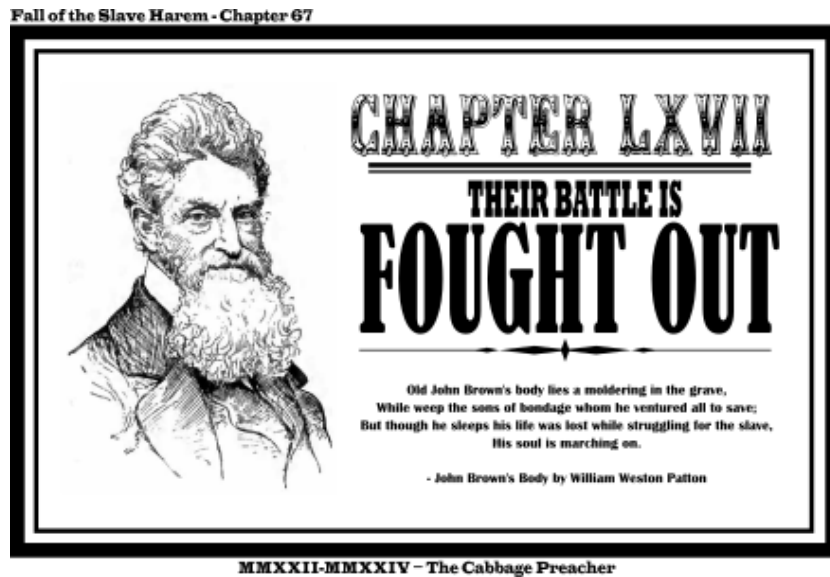
“Okay, you could have made this easy.” said Kim, now drenched with water. “I’d have captured all of you and... Why am I even explaining my plans to you anymore?!” He raised his fists of steel: a pair of gauntlets with spikes adorning the top of them. Swords were a bit too lame by Kim’s standards. It seemed he had given up on conversation as well judging from the fact that he was silently rushing towards the line of freemen with his right fist raised up for a punch.

The kilos upon kilos of metal armor made Kim appear sluggish; he was anything but sluggish. In a couple seconds he had closed the distance with the line of men throwing javelins at him, and his first target was the impudent Watanabe. Ayomide’s wind didn’t serve to slow the metal man down and soon he’d make contact with his foe if nothing went wrong...

...and then John Brown raised his M1 Garand up high.

BANG!

Chapter 70: Chapter LXVII – Their battle is fought out.



Today was a beautiful day like any other.

Clouds had parted way in an occasion that was rare for the summer of Northern Gemeinplatz, letting sunlight loose all over the muddy landscape of Casamonu. The birds had come out of retreat from General Autumn, chirping away while they had the rare opportunity to do so. An earthly smell permeated throughout the land only broken by the smell of iron, lipids, and a pinch of protein.

“ARGH! S-sibal!”

A single casing flew from John Brown’s rifle. Not another moment passed before...

BANG!

...Kim disappeared from his sight, dissipating into a black cloud. The second bullet found its home in a local tree rather than its intended target.

“I’ll have to admit, that did surprise me.” Brown couldn’t help but jolt upon hearing Kim speaking from behind him. The old man, and the rest of the line of freemen, turned to face him. “Now I admit tha-”

BANG! Kim dissipated into a black cloud once more. He reappeared on a spot very close to where he had disappeared, sitting on the ground while holding his left shoulder with his right hand.

“Give me-”

BANG! Kim wasn’t there anymore.

“A second to-”

BANG! Neither was he here.

“A SECOND TO-”

BANG! Ping! Now he had gone thitherward thithermost from the line of men over yonder, and Brown’s gun was empty.

“GIVE ME A SECOND TO TALK FOR *FUC*-”

BOOM! This time Kim didn’t have to move as Rabanowicz’s smoothbore pistol shot went wildly off-target.

“Fine! You savages do not deserve villainous monologues!” Despite having once looked threatening due to his all-black armor, Kim now looked quite pathetic while sitting on the mud. His face made it clear that he wasn’t having a fun time, probably due to the 7.2 mm (.308 inch) wide hole occupying his left shoulder along with other factors which might currently be souring his otherwise excellent day; his left arm had gone completely limp much to his horror. “Where did you even get that from?!” All composure was gone from the once edgy and cool exterior, though thankfully he had gotten a brief moment to calm down now that the freemen were out of javelins and Brown’s rifle was out of bullets.

“I know the answer to that as much as you do.” replied Brown, sticking another magazine into his new little friend. “But I thank the Lord for having sent us such a gift in such a great time of need.”

Kim paused, so had Tangerina. They were unsure of what to do now that they were outmanned and outgunned. Retreat was an option, yes, but these people had somehow managed to get a hold of modern weaponry! Who knew what’d happen if they got more? One John Brown with a semi-automatic rifle was hard enough, who knew what’d happen once there was one John Brown plus many angry men with a semi-automatic rifle? That’d have dire consequences on the economy!

“It’s probably that damn Japanese at the back supplying them.” thought Kim out loud, his gaze fixated upon the Watanabe who had attempted to stone him for his recent cryptocurrency shenanigans. John Brown seemed too old to be an isekai protagonist with special powers. “Tangerina! We aren’t retreating; we have to wipe them out now!”

Tangerina opened her mouth as if to say “Is that a good idea in this situation?”, but she wasn’t paid to open her mouth. She only nodded before preparing another spell to end all spells: “[Big Water...] erm... what was that again... crap...” A big ball of water was summoned from the half-spoken spell, splashing down harmlessly in a cooling fashion.

Meanwhile, Brown had an idea about what he should do with the witch in front of him. He raised his rifle, only to find Tangerina quickly yelling “[BIGDAMNWATERSHIELDHOLYSH-]” the moment she noticed the weapon aimed at her.

BANG! The bullet made contact with the bubble, only to burst it and land harmlessly next to Tangerina’s. Luckily, for Tangerina anyways, a big shield made out of water that had wrapped around her like a bubble worked against early 20th century firearms. Tangerina quickly cast another protective bubble around her, this time joined by Kim inside the bubble. With a combination of such swiftness and defense, how were the freemen supposed to break through?

If only there was a way to dry that water-bearing dastard, though Ayomide who was sick of dastards, bastards, and masters. An idea dawned upon her; an idea so simple that it should have come to her a few moments ago instead of now. “Old man, keep being ready to shoot.”

Things weren't easy for Ayomide however, for her enemy wasn't standing idly and waiting for turns to attack. Gemeinplatz wasn't civilized enough yet for turn-based battles, neither was Kim civilized enough to admit defeat and run. Now his movements were a bit slower so that he could stay inside the bubble of water, but his one functioning fist still represented a threat to the integrity of everyone else's precious internal organs and nobody dare approach him for a tackle.

The battle had turned into a semi-comedic scene, one which would have been fully comedic if not for this being a life-or-death situation, where the line of men retreated back from Kim while he tried to approach Watanabe. Kim went right, the line went right; Kim went left, the line went left; Kim couldn't go upwards as he couldn't fly, neither could the line follow him if he suddenly could.

Meanwhile, Ayomide was watching Tangerina. Her bubble of protective water was slowly thinning out, beads of salty water running down her forehead instead. Keeping up such magic without a proper magic staff or convenient magic gem seemed to be tiring the woman despite her great capacity for magic. Kim, the type of man to not care about the feelings of women at all unless the woman in question was their plot-convenient little sister, was continuing his policy of not caring. He was more focused on the scrawny loser who had just tried to stone him.

The protective bubble got thinner and thinner, until Tangerina had seemingly stabilized its thickness. Keeping such a barrier indefinitely would have been possible thanks to the fact that magic regenerated; as long as, hypothetically, no catgirls decided to interfere with anything, then Tangerina could keep producing enough magic to keep the barrier running.

Unfortunately, Tangerina lived in an imperfect world where catgirls could and would interfere with her business.

“[Ayomide's Special Dry Cleaning]!” With a special attack name she had invented approximately seven and a half minutes ago, Ayomide pointed her green gem towards the curs hiding behind their bubble. Then came forth a continuous gust of wind, not strong in terms of total force, but wide in area.

Kim and Tangerina were first confused as to why Ayomide was sending such a weak gust their way, for the wind seemed to have no value as an attack. Thankfully, they didn't need to wait much to clear their confusion; unfortunately, their confusion was soon replaced with horror. The gust of wind was swiftly evaporating the water comprising the bubble, which didn't help with its integrity. Ayomide had been the Chief Dryer (not an official title, yet) of Libertycave and a lot of her time had been spent in fierce battle with the slipping-and-sliding antics of pesky Lady Aqua (neither is this an official title, yet; nobody was planning on creating a cult based on such a personification of water, yet).

Tangerina tried her best to draw out her last remains of ye mystical magical power, but it was for naught. Naught it was, fraught she was, haught he was, caught in a pinch they both were. *Pop!* the bubble went, shattered like the Kim's dream of smacking poor Watanabe in the face...

BANG!

BANG!

BOOM!

...or so it seemed, until Kim dissolved and undissolved ever closer with every shot taken by a combined force of Brown, Tubman and Rabanowicz. Dissolving into dust and being a nuisance

seemed to be his thing. He was face-to-face with Watanabe now, so close that they could hear each other breath amidst the cacophony.

“[Flash Bang]!” Unfortunately, Ayomide was to be so rude as to interrupt a moment between these two men. She had anticipated that Kim would try to pull off a Hail Mary slay by approaching their line, and her gem had been raised at face-height towards the man trying to avenge his dollar-shaped pride.

Soon Kim’s vision was filled with light, the sort of light that made him feel like the Lord Himself had booked him an express ticket to kingdom come. “Thy kingdom come” as Brown and many other would utter in prayer; Kim’s kingdom came not as he crashed down to the wet mud below. His sense of balance was gone, he couldn’t see anything other than a black void, just cold, wet, disgusting mud as far as he could feel...

Kim’s ears were too busted at the moment to hear what happened next.

[Oh dear, you are dead!]

In this chapter of the John Brown Isekai:

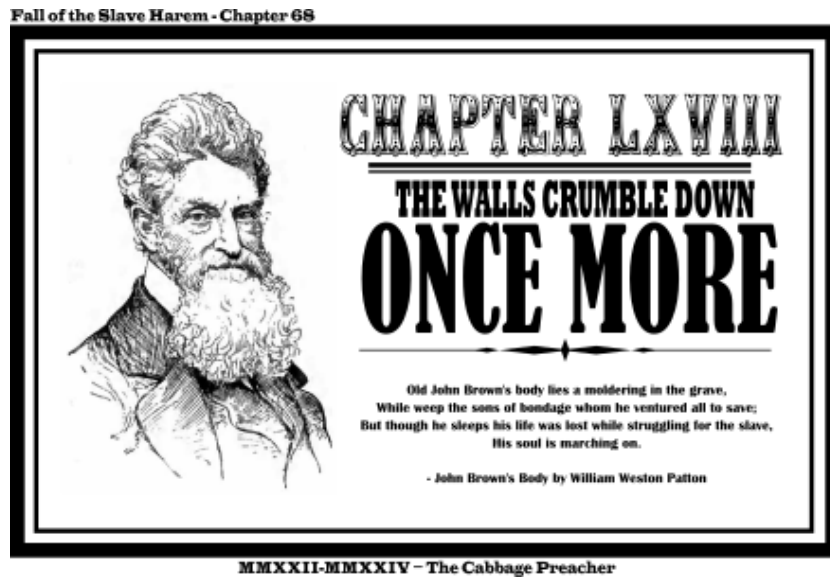


([Original artwork](#) by [MeatoWash](#))

Naught it was, fraught she was, haught he was, caught in a pinch they both were.

The above is my favorite sentence amongst the sentences I've written recently.

Chapter 71: Chapter LXVIII – The walls crumble down once more.



50th of Summer, 5859
City of Casamonu, Casamonu

Time: sometimes it passes, sometimes it doesn't.

General relativity hadn't been invented yet however, so the men besieging Casamonu couldn't exactly explain why the temporal flow had been rushing so quickly. One day they had come to besiege the town, and it only felt like a moment that the walls were slowly crumbling down right in front of their eyes.

"Fire!" Two cannons roared once more, taking off what was left of the old walls of Casamonu. It didn't have much protection due to being an inland town, nor was Casamonu built to last in the age of cannon in the first place. First the stone bricks fell down, then the earth packed inside the brick flowed down after being unshackled from its stony cage. Slowly, as the earthen core of the wall flowed free, so did the stone bricks from other sections free themselves as a chain reaction occurred to create a cascade of earth. It brought down a few poor souls down on the walls with it as well, making for quite the gruesome and chaotic mix by the end.

Sir Baha had been standing idly next to the cannons as he watched them break the walls. He intended to give orders when, in great jubilee and lack of patience, the other noblemen ordered their men to attack through the breach. Since they had already done what he'd planned to order them to do, Sir Baha sufficed by standing safely at the back and watching the battle unfold. His trusty servant Ted brought him his trusty binoculars, which gave him a clear view.

The first to enter the breach were the forlorn hope: convicted criminals seeking forgiveness or adventurers looking for extra cash. It was easy to conscript desperate enough men, whether looking for their freedom or just plain dosh, to brave the charge and put themselves vis-à-vis with certain death. They climbed up the rubble of the collapsed wall, meeting way more than twelve angry men behind the ruins of the wall.

Those who still stood atop the intact parts of the wall began throwing boulders and boiling water down to their besiegers as they tried to enter the breach. Even a simple boulder from such a height would cause a man's skull to be cracked open like a quail's egg meeting a road roller on a Sunday afternoon. Some heads were cracked open, some heads were boiled al dente, and a couple men managed to make it to the other side and escape being made into a gruesome meal for the earth below.

Forlorn hope was forlorn for a reason however, for their next appointment was with the polearms of the men standing on the ground. The broken part of the wall led into a narrow street, in which there were already a few sentries from the garrison of the city. These sentries set forth to delay the besiegers, while not forgetting to send some of their comrades as messengers to warn the other members of the garrison to make their way to defend the breach.

Now the backstreets of Casamonu, ever familiar with petty fights, had become a proper battleground. The forlorn hope, despite being somewhat outnumbered due to coming in as a trickle from the breach, went on the offense. Unlike the garrison men with their pikes and halberds suitable for a defense, the forlorn hope carried longswords and small round shields meant for a quick offense before the pikes could fall into formation. Even if they fell into formation, these men would just duck under the pikes and try their best to earn their pay by poking the legs of their enemies.

The garrison consisted of the men of the city, conscription during times of siege was the duty of every man living in an urban area in most of Gemeinplatz, who hadn't gotten much chance to train in acting as a group during the brief siege. Still, they managed to instinctively band together quickly enough to erect a line of pikes wide enough to block the street. Their lack of experience was covered by the fact that their weapons made their formation into a huge porcupine that wasn't too pleasant to try and break through.

Still, the forlorn hope had to earn their pay somehow with what few officers had managed to make it through with them watching them closely. The strategy to break these formations was simple: ram the long polearms with their shields to break the balance of its wielder, duck under the giant porcupine whose eyes were chiefly focused on other attackers, and pray that they'd manage to slip through and slice a couple people before they were skewered. Thankfully the members of the garrison were unskilled, so they had a hard time counter-skewering the men traversing below their pikes who became tangled together in a big mess as everyone tried to murder everyone else. Men screamed as their tendons were slashed, others couldn't scream due to having their throats being blocked by foreign metal objects.

It was quite the bloody mess, a bloody mess which eventually resulted in the garrison tactically retreating when the walls around the city crumbled once more. The rest of Sir Baha's allies began pouring into the backstreet, being met by the members of the garrison gathering reinforcements to block the street. Sir Baha himself rode in to the scene on his horse, commanding his own little retinue with a little surprise in store for the wall of men blocking them.

"Allies, stand back!" commanded Sir Baha, and the allies in question withdrew away from the wall of enemies ready to meet them.

"Men, fire!" Instead of arrows or lead balls shooting out as expected from the command, Baha's men took out hand-sized bags which were full. The bags had very short matches attached to them, borrowed from the matchlock firearms of Sir Corvus' men, and these bags were about to meet their intended recipients.

These bags, relatively light and easy to throw, flew towards the members of the garrison who had crowded around the street. It took a good few seconds for these bags to do their thing but, even if many men of the garrison realized their up and coming fate, nobody could escape back through the tight streets before the bags went off with a loud boom. As the experts know however, it's not the explosion that kills you, it's the shrapnel. These bags had also been packed with the little lead balls (a.k.a. ammunition for the firearms) also looted from Corvus' men, and these lead balls now flew around with the fury of a thousand muskets firing in unison.

With a bang, the garrison blocking the road was no more, being replaced by a gruesome scene which needs no further description lest this novel be declared adults-only by the relevant authorities, neither would most readers be likely to enjoy the description of this scene if it was done properly. To spare you the need for eye bleach, the scene post-explosion could be explained thus: It was as if somebody had bought out the entire stock of cranberry in a supermarket and smashed it with a giant mallet, proceeding to spew the cranberry in a frantic fashion mixed in with entrails for some reason which is not clear to anyone but the hypothetical somebody. Mix that with a lot of Late Medieval armor and weaponry, and you may be able to imagine the scenery in a more advertiser-friendly manner.

With their enemies having been turned into cranberry paste, it was time to move on to the rest of Casamonu. The men exited the street, doing their best not to step on someone's entrails.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Time: sometimes it passes, sometimes it doesn't.

General relativity hadn't been invented yet however, so the men besieged in Casamonu couldn't exactly explain why the temporal flow had seemingly ground to a halt. Some blamed chronomancers, some blamed chronomancresses, but the truth was that siege warfare included lots of waiting. Waiting around to see if the walls would be breached today, waiting to see if the enemy would finally retreat, waiting to see if it was all finally over... The anxiety of it all had made time stop without any need for magic or sci-fi shenanigans.

Count Leon too had been feeling restless. A small pocket of black had appeared beneath his eyes. He would have lost his hair tearing it apart if not for the fact that he had no hair to lose. Baldness wasn't his biggest problem however; he only had to shave what little hair he had once in a while to have a fully shiny head that looked attractive enough.

Unfortunately for Leon, fugitives and revolting lords outside his precious walls couldn't be shaved away like his pesky hair. He really wished to forge himself a giant razor which could pluck out the rebellious blades of hair camping outside his walls. Perhaps the dwarves could forge something like that if they had not abandoned him. "Those pesky, hairy, no-good sons of cave shrooms..." The count would definitely stomp on the next dwarf that entered his sight. He'd like to stomp on all the dwarves if he could. He'd like to gather enough gunpowder to blow their mountain down to-

Knock, knock. "Sir, it's me, Hilmi." ...*knock knock! KNOCK-KNOCK!*

Leon didn't exactly want to have a talk with his servant, but there was no other choice if he was to get any updates. "You may come in."

Hilmi bowed down to his lord... "Sir, I'll keep it short. A small battalion of enemy pigmen slaughtered all your guards on the walls. The palace guard has surrendered." ...for one last time.

“They wanted to have a servant come over to retrieve you.”

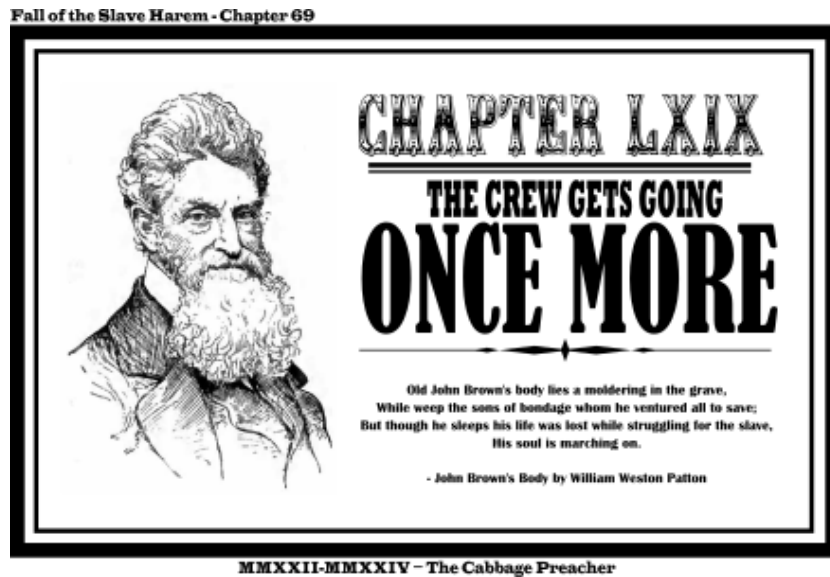
“...wait.” Leon was a bit too surprised to get angry right at that moment. “Wait, wait, wait a bloody minute, who did they surrender to?”

“The men of Sir Baha, sir.” Hilmi opened the curtain in Leon’s room, revealing a disorganized mob of men looting the grounds of the palace. “They entered so quickly that nobody here noticed them until they demanded that we open the gates of the castle.”

This was it. Leon would normally not be too worried about a civilized army comprised of fellow noblemen capturing him. It was tradition to ransom high members of society at worst if they were captured in honorable combat. Of course, his visitors were here because he had tried to capture a nobleman, which was considered a “dick move” by many.

The count’s chances were, “...not good.” as said out loud by Count Leon himself.

Chapter 72: Chapter LXIX – The crew gets going once more.



51st of Summer, 5859 Imperial Highway №04-763, Outskirts of Azdavay

All roads lead to Rome, except for the roads that were built in realities in which Rome doesn't exist. Such was the case with the Imperial Highway, on which you couldn't roam to Rome.

Where you could roam to was every other city in Gemeinplatz however, and traders loved to roam to grease the wheels of the economy. One such group was making their way, loaded with a dozen donkeys and a dozen men who were mostly indifferent from donkeys. They were marching single-file to allow anyone else to pass them if need be, though they hadn't seen anyone else for a long while now.

"The roads really are deserted, aren't they?" said the caravan master, whose title as "master" was confirmed by the fact that he had a really fancy feather attached to his silk cap.

"It's all the fugitives, sir." replied a caravan guard marching behind his back. "Though, I'm guessing you have heard about them already..."

"I thought that the others at the Merchant's Guild were exaggerating to try and discourage me from making some good profit." Of course, such a shrewd caravan master was not to be tricked by such lowly tricks, or so he had thought. "Still, if these lands aren't visited by others, then that just means there isn't much competition."

"You're right, sir." The guard patted the sword which laid securely in his scabbard. "It's not like a bunch of savage fugitives can harm... our... caravan?"

"Hm? Is there something wrong?" The caravan master had taken his eyes off the road while chitting and chatting. He turned around to see a most unsightly sight, one which he couldn't believe was real. "A-Are yo-you seeing that?!"

“Y-yes, sir!” Swords were drawn as the caravan got ready to fight. Their spirits didn’t last long though. “Ten, twenty, thirty... They just keep coming!”

“They” in question were a column of men marching in formation. Normally men marching in formation wouldn’t be that much of a concern, the caravan was doing the exact same thing, but the nature of these men made the caravan master soil his fancy pants. “What are these darkskins doing?!” He had never in his life seen so many of them at once, not to mention so many of them armed and in a military formation.

Panic ran amok amongst the ranks of the caravan, though they didn’t exactly have the tools to beat a fast retreat. Donkeys weren’t quick on their own, neither they were quick when they were loaded with goods. All the caravan master could do was watch as the column of fugitives got closer, and pray that he was granted a quick death.

“Good morning to you.” Instead, the caravan master was greeted by an old man greeting him from the front of the column. He seemed to be of the gentlemanly sort, far away from someone that the caravan master expected.

“Good... Good morning?”

“What a fine day, isn’t it? Such a clear sky, thank the Lord, a perfect day to take a walk and witness Creation in all its glory.” Such peaceful words came out a bit funny when it was said by someone who had an entire army behind his back. “Anyways, to get to the point...” The old man took a good look at the caravan loaded with goods. A few of the fugitives had already taken upon themselves to inspect the goods. They returned to report their findings to the old man. “Dried meat and fish? Grain? No slaves? Good, good, then I think we’ll have a healthy business relationship. How about you sell us everything you have?”

“Huh?” The caravan master was shocked once more. “I thought you were going to rob me?”

“Rob? Oh, no, robbery is a sin.” The old man procured a small bag of money from a petite catgirl next to him. “Things are about to get rough around these parts, so we’ll be doing you a favor by bailing you out of these goods which you won’t be able to sell otherwise.”

The caravan master received the small bag, opening it and even chewing on the coins to confirm their legitimacy. He had been given money, far away from being enough to compensate for all he had lost, but enough to let him start doing business again once he got back. This didn’t make him happy of course, but was he going to object to these hundreds of armed men? At least these bandits were merciful enough to not murder him outright.

Soon the fugitives had mounted the donkeys, seized their goods and let the caravan off with enough food to make it to their intended destination of Zon’guldac. As the two parties separated, the caravan master had one question:

Who the hell were these people?



51st of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, Castle Casamonu

Sir Baha had a big problem on his hands: he had won. Victory, sweet as it was, wasn't the end, and it only led to bigger problems that he had to contend with.

For now, Count Baha was sitting in the office of the Count of Casamonu. He had been declared the legitimate ruler by the loose coalition of noblemen he led. Now he had to fight the biggest enemy he had ever encountered: his co-conspirators, who were sitting in the office with him.

They were all quite comfortable physically, the count had thankfully not shied away from comfortable lounging with puffy sofas and cloudlike pillows all around the room. Mentally, however, they were tense like the spine of a sixtysomething who had slept all night in a cave.

"The fugitives, they have stopped their raids," announced a baron who Baha had convinced to join with promises of plunder which had been fulfilled after the siege. "We, and none of my fellow lords in the area, have reported any plantation being burnt down by fugitives."

"...excuse me?" Baha was confused as to why such good news would be delivered with such a somber tone. "That is good news! Isn't it?"

"The thing is..." replied the man next to the baron, who was the mayor of some village who had donated troops to the anti-count campaign. "The matter is, it is certainly true that the fugitives have stopped for now. The problem is that the fugitives weren't the only one committing such activities. We caught a group of lightskins trying to set the slave barracks of a plantation on fire after having killed some of the overseers and looted the plantation of its valuables. They, before we executed them, admitted to deliberately following the methods of the fugitives in order to confuse is into thinking that their actions were done by fugitives."

Count Baha could only groan in response. "...great." The implications of this weren't good: who knows how many of these raids were done by fugitives and others by plain old bandits? Thinking about it, so many plantations being harmed by such a discrete and small group of fugitives was impossible... Had law and order broken down so much that people were daring to do such brazen acts? Not to mention, *the count was deposed due to not being able to protect these petty lords... and I'm the count now!* He had to do something. Anything. Anything would be better than no action, but what was he to do with a treasury which had been emptied from the siege and a lack of trade?

Sir Baha had saved his head once; Count Baha had to find a way to save his head on which a little bronze crown stood. It's not like he could negotiate with the fugitives to somehow stop all of this... could he? Baha shook his head. No, trying to negotiate with the fugitives would just be a death sentence. The other noblemen would rather see their plantations burn rather than willingly surrender their primary source of cheap labor. Baha would see his head fly the moment that the fugitives eventually returned; they would definitely return since nobody had yet to find and destroy them.

This is it, thought Baha. *It's much better to live with dishonor than die with honor.* He had secretly negotiated with fugitives, rebelled against his liege to escape the consequences, hadn't he already gone beyond the point of no return? What was to further stain his honor when his honor had already been stained pure black?

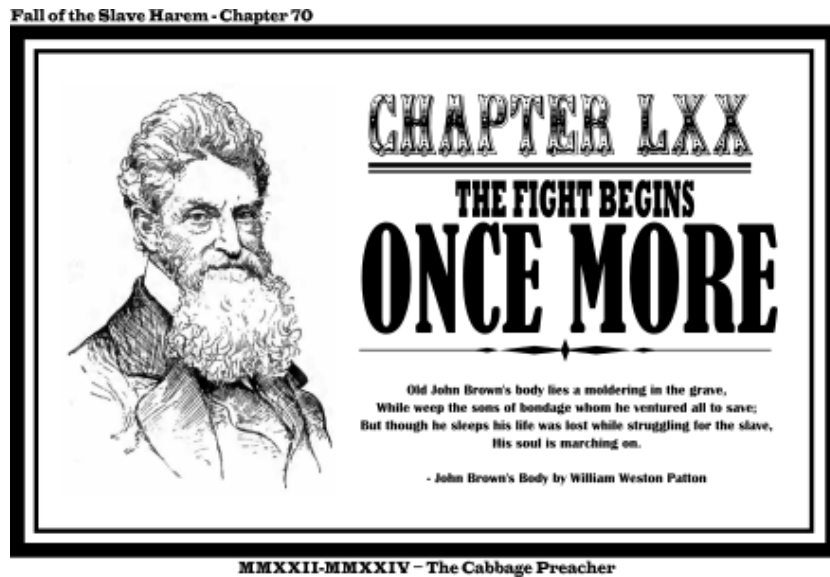
"We'll discuss these topics by gathering a council of lords tomorrow," replied Baha "I'll be listening too all of your concerns there and finding a solution. It shouldn't be too hard to deter some criminals." He looked at his visitors. They seemed convinced enough.

“Thank you, Your Excellency.” Both of his visitors bowed down before leaving the room.

The brief taste of power that Baha had managed to taste was more than enough. Power was bitter, tasteless, only desired by those who were addicted to it. Baha would rather not perish in his futile pursuit for power.

When time marched on and tomorrow came, Baha was nowhere to be seen in Casamonu.

Chapter 73: Chapter LXX – The fight begins once more.



52nd Summer, 5859
Azdavay, County of Casamonu

Sir Doruk, the mayor of Azdavay had a simple job: keep the peace, keep communicating with the count and keep anyone from capturing the city. The first one had been easy enough after he had turned a blind eye to the populace lynching some slaves, and the third one was more than easy enough considering that Gemeinplatz was at peace.

The second one seemed to be a hard ask during these times however.

Doruk was having issues with tax records and other reports which needed to be filed and sent to the count a week or two ago (thankfully submission times were a bit flexible to account for the fact that communication wasn't instantaneous). None of his couriers had come back, neither had any follow-up messengers he had sent to ask the count what was up. Now his desk was swamped with unsent records, taxes, messages... The high-society ladies and gentleman who had elected Doruk wanted answers, and they wanted answers *now*.

It was as if Azdavay had a magical barrier erected around it, isolating it from the rest of the empire. The only major road connecting them to the rest of the empire was the Imperial Highway, and one arm of it went directly to Casamonu. The other arm went directly to Zon'guldac. Neither arm had any blood flowing through it. No visitors came in to visit, which of course made anyone anxious to leave lest they encounter whatever has been eating up everyone outside Azdavay. Thankfully there were farms nearby Azdavay, otherwise Doruk would be facing starvation along with a stagnating economy.

Maybe he needed a fresh breath of air. That was it. No need for worrying about anything else as long as he could get a whiff of air and feel himself refreshed. Doruk opened his curtains and opened his windows to take a look at the city which he controlled?

“...what?”

The mayor saw a whole lot of people outside.

Most of these people had dangerously high levels of melanin.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Old Brown had come a long way. From Connecticut, to Kansas and to Virginia, and finally to this strange land called Gemeinplatz. The last one was the most alien out of all, with an unfamiliar land filled with unfamiliar people practicing an unfamiliar culture. Yet, despite their unfamiliarity, the downtrodden of Gemeinplatz demanded one thing:

“Freedom or death!”

They had gotten death for a bit too long, so the time had come for a pinch of freedom. Entering the town itself hadn’t been a hard task. In fact, it had been so easy that the narration hadn’t gotten the time to catch up.

Azdavay was a minor town without a defense against any organized army. Protecting against more than a hundred armed men was way above the pay grade of the city’s guards, so they had fired off a bolt or two before turning tail and disappearing. Such had also been true for the adventurers, who wouldn’t take one swing without one shilling paid to them.

The freemen, now soldiers, couldn’t believe their eyes. The Empire, the Leviathan which towered above them all, had retreated without much resistance. One could see much jubilee in the eyes of the freemen who were now marching on the streets and towards the center where the (soon-to-be former) mayor’s mansion stood.

In contrast to the victorious and jubilant freemen, the people of the town were locked up in their homes. Those without homes had retreated into the backstreets, and there was a general confusion going on. Who were these strange men breaking into their city? Had some sort of apocalypse befallen them? Were they all experiencing some mass hysteria?

Unfortunately, for the nerves of the town people, what they were seeing was very much true. It was morning, the sun was rising, and Brown’s men had made it to the town square. The mayor’s mansion was quickly besieged, the guards in the mansion surrendered, and it was only a matter of time before somebody got the mayor.

Warfare, as quick as lightning, had been conducted without a casualty suffered. Despite that however, Brown and Tubman looked quite nervous. They had finished the easy part, the one which is (supposed to be) violent. The hard part had been softening the local authorities until such an operation was possible, by raiding their economy and weakening their unity.

The hardest times were yet to come, though that part hadn’t been realized by most of the freemen who were drunk on victory. Soon, they’d have to begin reconstructing something out of the mess that they had caused in Azdavay.

To turn from a bunch of unknown fugitives in the mountains to some sort of legitimate government, without having the local populace overthrowing them the moment they left...

One of the freemen ran up to Brown. “Captain, we found the mayor in his office. They’re bringing him over now.”

...It'd be quite the hard task, to say the least.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Sir Doruk, the mayor of Azdavay had a simple job: keep the peace, keep communicating with the count and keep anyone from capturing the city. This story isn't about him however, for Doruk was no longer acting as mayor after having failed at all three of his assignments. Now somebody else occupied his seat: former maid café worker turned abolitionist catgirl wizard turned Captain Ayomide. She only physically occupied his former seat however, no one person had gotten the responsibilities of the mayor just yet. Brown and Tubman were also amongst those who occupied the former mayor's office, though they were sitting at the corner of the desk and discussing deep matters that didn't interest Ayomide at that moment. She didn't get why they were so worked up after having achieved victory. Hers was quite the cushiony seat, and Ayomide intended to sit there as long as she could without a worry in her head. Plus, the sweet irony of sitting where the head honcho of the town she had once been enslaved in made it all the better.

"Salutations, Her Imperial Majesty Lady-Mayor Orange!" Shinasi entered the room and saluted Ayomide. He immediately broke his salute as he broke out into laughter. Maybe it was the joy of victory, maybe it was because he had raided the mayor's cellar and done extensive taste-testing, but the young man seemed a whole lot giddier than usual. He found a seat on the mayor's desk, almost knocking over a huge stack of papers that sat on it.

Brown immediately withdrew the papers from Shinasi's general area, shooting an angry glance at his chemically inconvenienced comrade-in-arms. "Young man! These are the most important items in this here room, for the love of the Almighty, please do take care not to damage them!"

"These?" Shinasi didn't exactly find much excitement in papers, unless they were banknotes or cheques.

"Yes, these!" Brown shuffled the papers back into order and made a grand "*thuck thuck!*" while he straightened them on the table "These are what we need to achieve victory."

"Excuse me, but haven't we achieved victory already?" asked Ayomide. Occupying the mayor's soft seat sure felt like victory to her.

"course not! Think bigger, Miss Ayomide!" interjected Tubman. She was as restless, if even more, than old Brown. "We're not here to grab a bunch of our brothers and sisters before making an escape like we usually do. With God by our side, we're here to stay, and for that we need to cut off the head of the snake. What better way to start than by checking the records of the mayor?"

"The records of the mayor? What was he recording?" Having never participated in the governing process, Ayomide was left in the dark.

"The people in this town. Number of adults in households, who is working and who is not, who owns what and *who owns who* for the sake of taxation... or so I assume, none of us can read these." The last part caused Tubman's mood to turn sour. "Our plan is to learn who owns slaves in this town, and strike them down before they have a chance to organize against us. Along with many other surprises that I and Brown have in store."

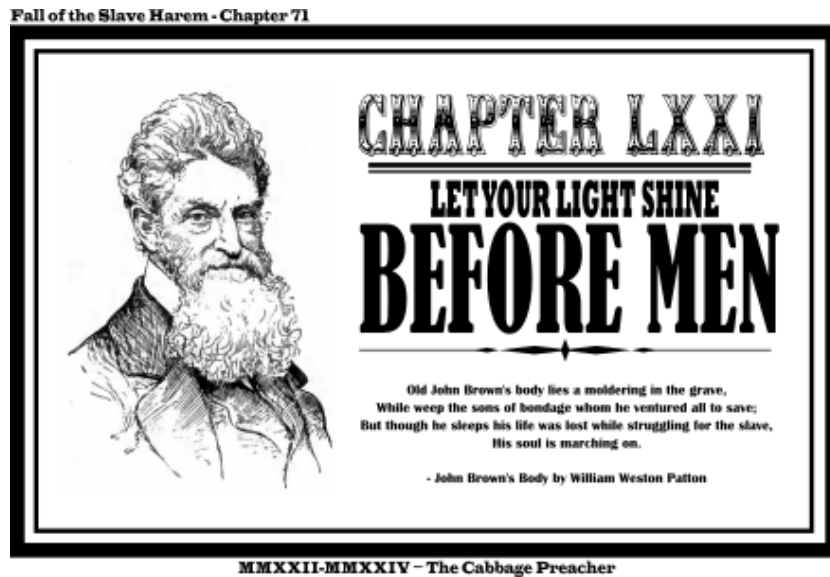
Brown nodded. "We need to act quick, however. I already ordered some men to block the gates of the town and forbid anyone from leaving, but that cannot last forever. Nobody yet knows why we are here and what we want from them, so it's better to get the gentlemen out of the way before they

realize that we're coming for their heads. After that is a long process of getting the populace here to accept us..." The old man felt his head ache while thinking of that. "No matter, our focus now is to stabilize what we can immediately stabilize. With our Heavenly Father above, we'll deal with other issues as their turn comes. Anyone here have any suggestions for where we can find some literate people willing to read these for us?"

"Oh, I do! I do!" Shinasi screamed like an excited schoolchild. "Some of the bigger parties in the Adventurer's Guild have those smart literates to do their accounting and whatnot. If you pay them enough money they'd probably accept to read whatever for you."

"That... That is a good idea. I'm glad to see that your brain is still functional, young man." Brown clapped his hands and stood up. "Prepare to have a long night, ladies and gentlemen."

Chapter 74: Chapter LXXI – Let your light shine before men.



A great many delusions have been swept away by this war. One was, that the Negro would not work; he has proved his ability to work. Another was, that the Negro would not fight; that he possessed only the most sheepish attributes of humanity; was a perfect lamb, or an "Uncle Tom;" disposed to take off his coat whenever required, fold his hands, and be whipped by anybody who wanted to whip him. But the war has proved that there is a great deal of human nature in the Negro.
- Frederick Douglass, *What the Black Man Wants* (1865)

53rd Summer, 5859 Azdavay, County of Casamonu

Things were quite tense around in ye olde Adventurer's Guild. Understandably so: they had lots of unexpected guests in the town. Unfortunately, the adventurers hadn't had any times to prepare any meals for their guests due to the unexpected nature of their visit. Quite rude of them not to have anything ready for their guests, but I digress from the main point of the John Brown Isekai which is the Johning and Browning.

Moving on from the impromptu etiquette class, the guild itself was quite packed with people. So packed in fact that everyone was standing shoulder-to-shoulder. Most of this crowd weren't adventurers despite the name of the building clearly suggesting it should be full of adventurers; the common folk of the town had made a run for the building with the biggest concentration of armed people in the local area. There were a few priests from distributing food while a pair of babies were crying in some far away corner of the room. Some poor old git had been relegated to a corner due to having forgotten to put on their clothes during their panicked escape, while on another corner someone was trying to quickly sell their house on the cheap before the fugitives would surely burn it down. An odor, a waft of sweat mixed with a pinch of fear and soiled underpants, permeated throughout the room. Not the most pleasant environment to be in, but it seemed a whole lot more pleasant than having to deal with the "horde of savages" outside.

One person of relatively import was Shakira, the former adventuring comrade of Shinasi, who had found herself stuck on a table. Her position was quite rough: the table was quite the long one, and

everybody who needed to rest their precious legs had occupied the space around her. She had put her head on the table. The cacophony in the room was quite unignorable, so she hadn't managed to travel into the realm of sleep despite desperately wanting to book a ticket there. There was one especially loud git in the room, possibly half-drunk or fully-drunk, who was standing on a table while preaching. His garb seemed to suggest he was some sort of preacher, with a humble robe and a white cap taking him one or two centimeters close to some sort of divine power.

"Hear ye, hear ye!" The preacher stomped his foot on the table to grab attention. His stomping noise dissolved like a droplet of water in a tsunami amongst the crowd of people. Still, he managed to get the attention of a few people including that of Shakira. "This is a sign, people! Have you not seen the moral degeneration of Gemeinplatz? Our lords are corrupt, our men lazy and our youth corrupt! With how far we have fallen from the days of the old empire, it is not a wonder that the Divine has sent these demons to punish us! The rise of the Demon King is near!"

One of the priests in a white robe shouted from nearby the preacher "I'd say that it is more likely that our punishment is for how we've treated the darkskins and forced them to be here in the first place!" This overtly humanistic comment caused many heads to turn around towards the man shouting such odd things. "Harmony shall only be achieved once we send all races back to where they belong: lightskins in Gemeinplatz and the darkskins back north to *Ginye*!" Having fulfilled his racism quota, the priest intended to go back to his job only to be interrupted by a new challenger arriving with new hot takes.

"So, you're saying that we should send Lord-knows how many people to a foreign land just to pretend that we rid ourselves of our sins? Aren't we all meant to be all equal under the gaze of the Divine?" This take came from someone who had no robes, but he had the glorious beard of a priest that made him eligible to take part in this discussion. "Why don't you ship yourself out to *Ginye* and let the darkskins stay in Gemeinplatz instead?"

The desktop preacher raised a point that seemed poignant to him and the others in the room "First off, it's debatable if the darkskins are even human-"

"They are human, but undeveloped. Like children." replied the priest.

"Alright, setting aside the potential humanity of the darkskins, Gemeinplatz belongs to us lightskins! The Divine put us here, rightfully so as our race is the only one mature enough to diligently enjoy the many bounties of this land, and you expect *me* to leave this place to the barren deserts of *Ginye*?" He looked at the audience for approval, which he got loads of heads nodding upon his gaze. By now the entirety of the Adventurer's Guild had tuned into the debate.

Amongst those who nodded in approval was the priest. "Yes, and that is why our races must be separate to prevent conflict and further oppression. We should send the darkskins back to their natural environment where they belong, lest we see more disasters akin to the one we have experienced today!" He had the crowd's approval as well, and the only one left without any approval was the plain-clothed man who was now served the angry gaze of the crowd. He was about to defend himself, only for his voice to be drowned out by a flurry of disapproving grunts and mild insults that gradually turned more violent.

The desktop preacher called out to the man with his booming voice "You, I wonder if you'll be able to spout that nonsense when these savages forcibly deflower our women, murder the men and burn the city to the ground! They know not of civilization, of faith and of love!"

Despite the crowd's booing and grumbling, the plain-clothed man managed to shout out his line "Don't we force the darkskins to serve our vices, don't we murder those who escape and don't we burn their cities to the ground in order to capture them? Tell me, in which way are we different from savages?"

The priest, standing somewhere in the center of the two, rebutted with the classic "Hard labor builds character for the darkskins which they naturally lack!" As the tensions in the crowd got hotter and a few angry folks began making their way towards the plain-clothed man, the priest slowly retreated towards the desktop preacher to distance himself. "We must send them back so that-" By now, discussion had broken down as a bolder member of the crowd grabbed the collar of the plain-clothed man. The savages were about to beat the poor man to death when they saw something even more concerning outside the window.

"The darkskins! They're here!"

"Hide the children!"

"Screw the children, hide yourselves!"

Some drew their weapons, some began praying, all were in a state of panic. A platoon of soldiers had surrounded the guild building from all sides. None in the building were brave enough to charge out there.

On the contrary to those inside, somebody on the outside was brave enough to enter. It was a semi-familiar figure to many, an unremarkable young man who had been a foreigner to Azdavay. Only Shakira could remember that his name was Shinasi. He had his hands raised up, and no arms were to be found on his body other than the ones which were made of flesh. "Goodness, this place is quite crowded..." The room was so quiet that one could hear a microscopic pin drop on a pillow. All eyes were on the man once thought to be unremarkable. "So, uhm, we've got a quest for you?" He took out a sack full of coins, shaking it around to let the room hear how full it was. "Ten libra! Ten libra for any literate people who are willing to help the... mayor." Having seen the crowd of people had disheartened Shinasi quite a bit. They'd probably have to do *something* about this, but he wasn't the ideas man except for ideas about wine-related infiltration tactics.

"Ten?" The desktop preacher's eyes opened up like an open wallet.

"Ten?" The priest's eyes too opened up like an open wallet.

The other man was unable to open his eyes in reaction to this information as he had escaped from the scene with his bones intact. The two that had been left behind slowly made their way through the crowd of people to meet with Shinasi. "So, what's with the darkskins outside?" asked the desktop preacher.

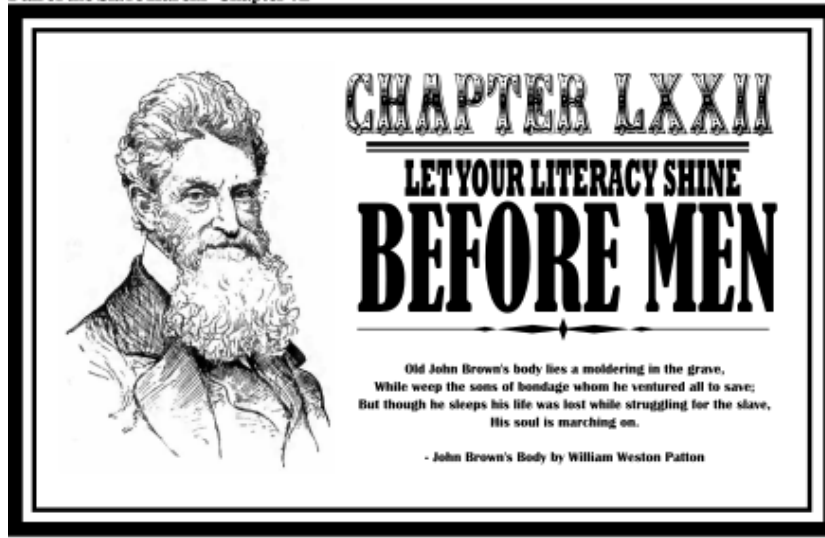
"Oh, them? Don't worry, they're friendly folk." Shinasi waved towards the back, and some of the soldiers waved back at him.

Taking a look at how well-armed the men outside looked, the desktop preacher and his comrade-in-debate decided not to question further. They were probably some slave soldiers or something recruited by some lord and, considering how the town hadn't burned down, it seemed that Azdavay was going to be spared.

“Let’s go then.” With that, Shinasi and co. were off to introduce these men of the cloth to the new sheriff in town.

Chapter 75: Chapter LXXII – Let your literacy shine before men.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 72



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

53rd of Summer, 5859

Rogers' Plantation, Outskirts of Casamonu / Azdavay

Tensions were quite high everywhere in Casamonu, for reasons not as of yet related to the hostile takeover in Azdavay. Such high tensions called for becoming higher than the tension to escape it, which meant that business was going well for Sir Rogers' tobacco plantation. To meet this demand the already strict production quotas had been made even stricter, sleep time had been reduced from 6 hours to 4, and new slaves had been bought from nearby plantations that had gone bankrupt from the raids.

Sir Rogers himself had been saved from bankruptcy thanks to the sudden increase in the average level of stress in the region. He was having a whiff from his pipe; not from his own supply of course, he was a rich enough man that he could afford a mix of tobacco imported overseas and "poppies" imported from the North. This man of high status was reaching new highs as he burnt away his not-so-hard-earned cash in his pipe of dreams. Not that he had a shortage of money to burn; a man like him could convert all his money to banknotes, use the banknotes as toilet paper every day, and still live a comfortable life for the rest of his existence on the temporal realm. It was a life free of worry except for the times when his slave barracks happened to burn down. Other than that, Sir Rogers could kick up his heels and relax.

However, his relaxation was cut short by a worrying matter, that being that the plant matter in his pipe had all burnt up. No matter however, for Sir Rogers could call up some more. He rung a bell on his desk to call one of his servants. Then he rang it again. And again. One more time for good measure. Was he just so high that time seemed to be moving so slowly? A couple minutes had already passed by now and nobody had knocked on his door to help. Quite the odd thing for a man who had a couple servants serving him.

"Hello? Anyone?" Sir Rogers still had enough of his mind working to sense something was wrong. He struggled to get up his chair and wobbled to the nearby window, where he found the plantation to be devoid of any workers. It was morning, the prime time for work. He'd have to punish

whoever had let the slaves laze around. Then he turned back, almost collapsed onto the floor as even this simple action of turning around was enough to overload his clouded mind, and waddled towards a door leading to a corridor. Waddle and waddle he did, for a very long time, until his jittery hands finally made contact with the doorknob. It clicked open, the door swung open, and Sir Rogers finally lost his balance and found himself on the floor when he tried to hold on to the accelerating door. The noise made by his body crashing on to the floor was great, so great that it prompted some footsteps to begin approaching him. He was ready to chew out whoever would come into his sights first, though that whoever turned out to be very unexpected.

“Is that him?” It was a bloke clad in a gambeson, carrying a spear, leading a group of half-naked slaves carrying agricultural tools.

“Hey! Where have you been all this time?” shouted Sir Rogers. He shook his fist around, furious and unserved. “Get me something to smoke, damn you!” His attempts at getting off the ground failed due to his lack of balance.

The slaves didn’t seem to be too willing to oblige however, and they slowly approached their master instead. The guy in the gambeson opened his mouth to stop them, before taking a pause and changing his mind. “Eh, he’s going to be executed anyways. Do what you want with him.”

★ **FALLOFTHESLAVEHAREM** ★

53rd of Summer, 5859

Azdavay, County of Casamonu

The former mayor’s office in Azdavay had turned into a jungle of paper-shifting quill-dancing bureaucracy overnight. A couple more of the well-read members of Azdavay had joined the mayor’s office after the two men of the cloth upon hearing (thanks to Brown letting the preacher go back to the Adventurer’s Guild to recruit more) the excellent pay offered by their new visitors, not to mention that getting on the good sides of their new “overlords” seemed to be a good deal for them. Brown had his own place at the table, with a large sheet of paper where he transcribed the mayor’s records into Latin script.

“Lady Lily of Azdavay, two slaves. Lives in the 14th Street.” shouted Vaiz, the only one in Brown’s party who knew how to read and write thanks to having been educated as a clergyman.

“Sir Ford of Azdavay, one slave in his household. House is on Flower Street.” declared the desktop preacher whom had taken quite a liking to the money now sitting comfortably in his pockets.

“Sir Rogers of Azdavay, seventeen slaves and three overseers employed in his plantation. Plantation is situated on the road to Casamonu.” cried out one of the receptionists at the Adventurer’s Guild.

“We just got Sir Rogers; you can cross him out.” replied Ayomide from outside the room. She was out of breath due to having been running to-and-fro all day. “I haven’t heard from anyone else in a while. I think we’ve almost gotten everyone who’s in the records, well, anyone who has not escaped.”

“Not that there should be too many high-society people, especially in a small town.” To Brown, Azdavay felt like a small American village rather than something that deserved to be called a town. He wrote another line on the translated record before continuing “We aren’t working on those

records just to find the blue-blooded enslaver of men. Getting rid of them was just the first step of the plan.”

“The first step? How many steps are there?” asked Ayomide standing under the doorframe.

“As many as we need, young lady. Only our Heavenly Father can predict the future.”

You could have just said ‘I don’t know’, thought Ayomide. No matter, she liked the part where she got to apprehend the high and noble men of the realm. Old John Brown was all about “not taking revenge” and “only fighting for what was right”, but Ayomide wasn’t. So were her comrades-in-arms.

Brown continued working on transcribing the records, his eyes focused only on the numbers upon numbers. He wasn’t an accountant, far from it, but he wanted to have a general idea on how society in Gemeinplatz worked in the first place. A 19th century man like him only had a vague outline of pre-modern society through Shakespearean plays, semi-truthful biographies of the great men of the past and the fantastical accounts of the Bible. Perhaps it’d even be correct to say that his level of (or lack of) knowledge wasn’t too far off from a 21st century person who only knows of the Medieval Ages through pop culture.

As for the numbers themselves, they were surprising. Brown had left the world before industrialization and mechanization got crazy, the old man hadn’t lived to see commercially produced electric light bulbs, but even by the mid-19th century agricultural production had increased considerably and Brown himself was quite involved with agriculture considering he had lived on the frontier. Traction engines, threshing machines, artificial fertilizer... All the people of Gemeinplatz had were oxen, scythes and manure.

Most of the grain was consumed by the peasants themselves while the excess was taxed away (yields for cash crops was similarly low, though those yields had recently gotten exceptionally lower due to old John Brown). This low yield meant that there was little surplus for urban centers, which meant that the urban population in Gemeinplatz was quite low compared to what Brown was used to. In the case of Azdavay, it had more than ten thousand peasants on record (not all of them recorded individually, only as households to be taxed) for an urban population that barely surpassed a thousand.

This was a big, and unsurmountable problem for John Brown.

There was no way for him to get an agricultural revolution going without an industrial revolution, and getting an industrial revolution going was a bit tricky to say the least. It was certainly not Brown’s expertise. Unless the Lord was to come down and reveal to him the secrets to constructing a usable steel engine with Medieval metallurgy, which wasn’t a thing that God was known to do, then Brown had no luck getting that going (not to mention the fact that an industrial revolution takes more than just making steam engines). Lacking the common isekai protagonist powers of pulling inventions out of his breeches, Brown only had one option: try to reorganize the already existing agriculture as best as he could, make sure that the peasants were getting their fair share instead of being lorded over like slaves along with making sure that there were no slaves in the process.

The old man’s head was already beginning to hurt thinking about all this; old John Brown hadn’t actually gotten to the part where he had to administer territory. He was a rebel, an abolitionist, not a

politician. He made up his mind to delegate all this business to someone he could trust as soon as possible.

For now, however, there was business that was way more immediate. Brown turned to Ayomide, who was still catching her breath under the doorframe. “Have we captured everybody we needed?”

“Mmh?” Ayomide jolted up from her half-asleep state. “Oh, the big men? We couldn’t find some of them, they probably made a run for it, but we got most of them and freed their slaves. A bunch of the slaves agreed to come to Azdavay with us, but some of them wanted to stay in the plantations.”

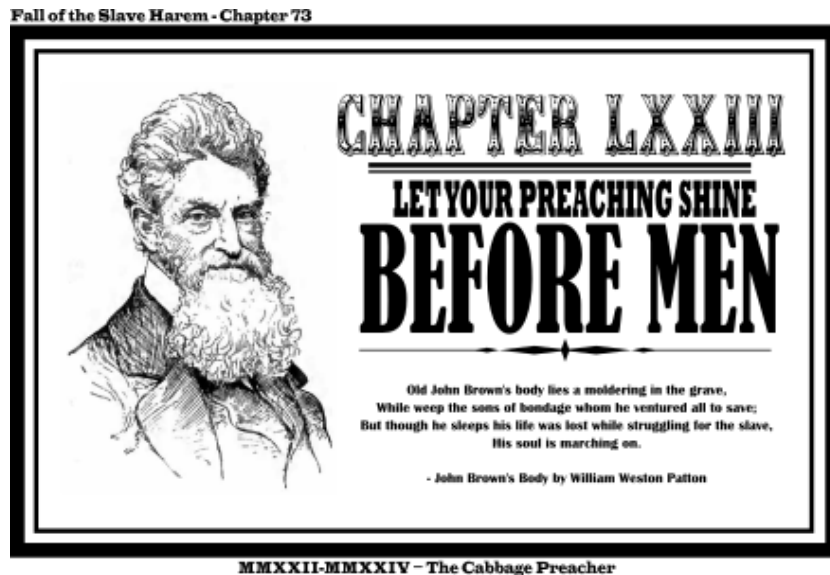
Brown was surprised by the brief report. “Stay?”

“Yeah, one of them told me that they want to keep working there. Something about ‘this is all we’ve known in our lives; we’ll keep this place ourselves and sell the crops’.” Ayomide shrugged, making a few grumbles of disapproval. “Actually, now that the owners are going to be dead, who’ll own the land?”

This simple question from Ayomide caused the entire room to pause and go silent. While the question seemed innocent enough at the surface, it was one which questioned Gemeinplatz society at its core. People loved to listen in when Brown ranted about the lords, but there was also the question of who would replace these lords. Lords didn’t exist just for the sake of it: they were the owners and managers of the lands that the peasants and slaves worked on. If not them, who?

Brown and Tubman knew the answer, though both sufficed by looking at each other and nodding. They already had collected the data needed to redistribute all this land. “Young lady, be patient. First, we have to rid ourselves of these lords permanently.”

Chapter 76: Chapter LXXIII – Let your preaching shine before men.



54th of Summer, 5859 Azdavay, County of Casamonu

Another day had dawned in Azdavay. The effects of yesterday were still pretty apparent on the nervous faces of the populace. It wasn't easy to forget the fact that a bunch of slaves had marched in unison on these streets, and that fact was quite the nerve-racking one for many. Nobody had any idea yet as to what their new occupiers wanted, most had though that they'd all have been slaughtered by a band of angry fugitives by now.

Despite their many worries however, the town was perfectly intact and most were alive except for a few upper-ups who had disappeared (though most people didn't personally know their former overlords in the first place). The fugitive soldiers had mostly kept themselves to the mayor's mansion and town hall only occasionally being seen bringing newly freed slaves in. Nobody really knew, outside of wild guesses, what this slave revolt was planning on doing.

And so, still being alive and needing some guidance of a spiritual nature, the temple was packed full by people. Not that it was empty by any measure on any other day, but today was another level of crammed. Not a particle oxygen was to be found in the temple, the air being filled by the smell of the common man (which was not a pleasant smell in any way, shape, or form). They were sat on the ground, waiting for the priest to arrive. He eventually did, along with a couple more flanking him; that was unusual as normally one priest was to attend noon prayer.

At the front of this congregation of priests was Vaiz, who had mostly been busy attending to the fugitives of Libertycave and going through records until now. Now was his time to finally shine. He cleared his throat, and allowed the temple to come to complete silence. And then he allowed the silence to continue on for a while longer. Vaiz was gauging his audience while piquing their curiosity as to what he was about to say with the delay. It was quite easy for him to see the mixture of fear and curiosity on people's faces. He himself found it hard to hide how stressed he was. A man of the cloth like him could have easily led an easy life and not get himself into this mess. A

slave uprising was the last thing he should be the public face of rationally speaking. However...
“Ahem, dear Believers. If I may have your attention!”

Vaiz suddenly shouting caused some to jolt up. The silence was broken, and now was time to pay full attention to the man at the altar. “If I may have your attention! Attention to the fact that we are missing many from our congregation!” He paused to let murmurs pass among the flock. Who was missing? The whole town had practically packed themselves in. “Behold, your siblings!”

Minor chaos ensued when these siblings walked into the room, and somebody in the flock shouted out “Darkskins!”

Vaiz had finally found a suitable place for his congregation, and he wasn’t giving them up. He banged on the altar multiple times to calm people down. The members of the congregation already in the room instinctively retreated away from the newcomers as they entered. However, they couldn’t fully segregate themselves due to how full the room was. Despite objections, the free people of the town came shoulder-to-shoulder with the fugitives. Vaiz began speaking once his congregation had settled into an uncomfortable status-quo. “Behold your siblings whom you have done your best to ignore for so long! Behold them, they who are equal members of creation as you are! Behold them, they who are equally as blessed by the Divine! Behold them, they who have all the right to stand-” Vaiz crouched down as a shoe speeded towards him. He raised his head up, only to meet another volley of shoes. The congregation clearly weren’t satisfied with what he was preaching. He was besieged behind the altar until the angry congregation ran out of their limited supply of shoes.

Thankfully the altar had proved shoe-resistant. Vaiz popped his head up again, meeting eye-to-eye with his congregation. Their frustrations seemed to have been vented for now. He let out a very quiet, almost inaudible groan; it wasn’t going to be easy to lecture these people. “I get that you are upset at having to stand right next to the ones that you deem to be savages. However, I ask you: who right now is defiling such a hallow place and hour by throwing shoes at a priest?” Vaiz leaned on the altar and towards the congregation, suddenly heightening the volume of his voice. “If there was anyone who needs to leave, then it is those uncivilized savages who have thrown the shoes!” He saw heads turn away from him when he directly looked at members of the audience. “Now, the Divine instructs us to be kind and patient, especially to those who need education. I pray that you have learned your lesson.” He relaxed his posture and stopped leaning on the altar. Time had come for prayer, now that his lecture was finished.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

The red sun in the sky was at its zenith, frying the congregation as they headed out the temple. Those who had failed to recover, or were too embarrassed to recover, their shoes amongst the pile were even unluckier; their bare feet burnt in contact with the scorching road below. It was as if they were receiving a small taste of hell. However, the scorching ground was about to be the least of their concerns when they saw the next attraction that Brown and co. had planned for today.

“Ayomide, be a bit gentle, won’t you? We’re supposed to keep these prisoners alive for only a moment longer.” Shinasi was standing guard next to a tall oak tree which stood in a garden next to the temple along with everyone else from Libertycave. He and their noble prisoners were surrounded by men of the League of Gileadites supported by newly-hired adventurers to plug gaps. The irony of adventurers protecting them and standing in formation with former slaves wasn’t lost to the freemen or the adventurers, but the adventurers were paid enough not to complain. Having prisoners scream for dear life toward their backs did make this job quite annoying however.

John Brown too was with Shinasi, though he was more occupied with dragging in a box towards the middle of this barricade. Not that he was going to give a speech himself, no. He wasn't suitable for what they were planning, for Brown didn't look too far from the common man of Gemeinplatz despite being an otherworlder. They needed an otherworlder who was sufficiently foreign-looking to them, and an otherworlder who had gathered experience in acting after having worked an office job for several years. As Brown put the box in a suitable place for the people of Azdavay to see him, that person took his stage on top of the box.

"Ahem, err... *Konnichiwa*, people of Azdavay!" The one who took on the challenge of climbing the box was the errant otherworlder Brown had chanced upon in a dungeon. "I am Watanabe Haruhi, *yoroshiku onegaishimasu*."

The sounds of a language from the mythical lands of Örf immediately caught the attention of people of Azdavay. This mixing of languages was deliberate, otherwise Watanabe knew well enough that the Japanese language made no sense to the people in Gemeinplatz. He had been extensively trained by Vaiz beforehand, who had gotten the idea to have Watanabe on stage in the first place. The young man was decked out with a suitably impressive outfit scrounged together from the possessions of various noblemen: a golden tiara, an impressive set of steel armor and a deep blue tabard trimmed in gold.

"*Nanika nantoka kantoka*, I have come here to warn Azdavay and the rest of Gemeinplatz of a great threat!" Watanabe had to keep himself from breaking down in laughter after seeing people be so willing to listen to his gibberish. He had to stop himself at releasing a few snickers that went unnoticed amongst the chaos of the crowd.

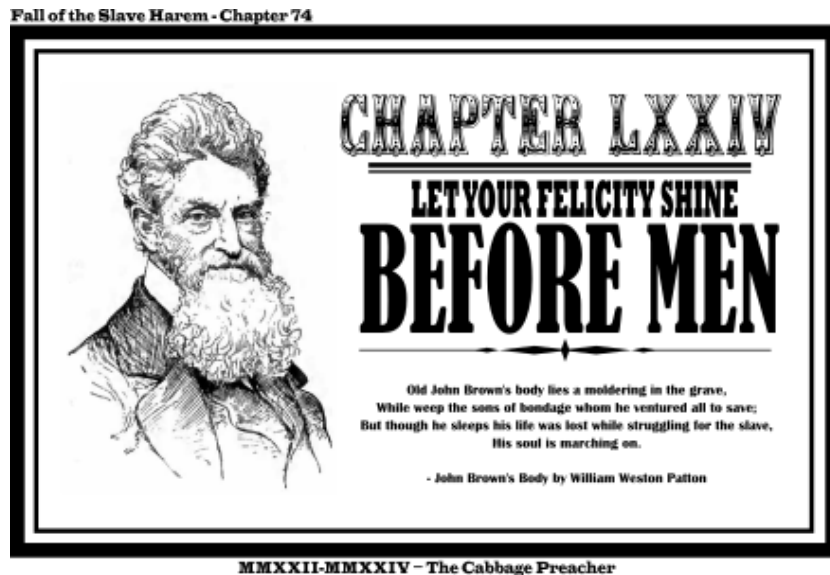
"On Örf I was a techno-wizard, and through my devices I saw that one world in particular was in danger, that being Gemeinplatz. The elders of Nehoun then elected me to be sent as a Hero to assist you!" The crowd was dead silent upon being warned once more. "This realm, Gemeinplatz, has been beset upon by the agents of the Demon King! You have just witnessed one of his machinations when he made you attack men of the cloth through his dark influence. Yes, his influence is so great that he'll make you go fight against the word of the Divine!"

Meanwhile, in the background, the captured slaveowners were having nooses tied around their necks by former slaves. Brown had ideally wanted to conduct a trial for them and whatnot, but he wasn't going to wait around even for a show trial. These slaveowners had committed many crimes. They had stolen the freedom of men, they had stolen the labor of peasants... Theft, of such a large scale, was a capital offense in most of Gemeinplatz; Brown was only making sure that the law applied to everyone, using a language that was understandable to the people of Gemeinplatz.

"So, from today onwards, we shall fight against the legions of the Demon King! Those behind me, they have served him by separating you from your siblings; we must unite as one to stand against the Empire controlled by the Demon King! If you think of your siblings here as demons, and as lowly slaves, then that is nothing but lies told by the servants of the Demon King looking to weaken us!" By now, Watanabe had gotten into his role. He was making grand gestures with his hands, he was shouting, he had gotten into the role of a hero as he had practiced. "Join me, the Hero, and fight against the demons who have oppressed you for so long!" The crowd was in an uproar. Whether they agreed or disagreed, they had been agitated.

As the crowd shouted, the slaveowners, those "servants of the demons", were brought closer to the tree. Soon they'd no longer live in Gemeinplatz.

Chapter 77: Chapter LXXIV – Let your felicity shine before men.



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

54th of Summer, 5859
Azdavay, County of Casamonu

"Phew, that was really bloody tiring." Watanabe sat on a sofa in the office of the former mayor. He quickly threw away the "chestplate" (a round metal plate next to his heart secured there by some leather straps) which had heated up greatly under the sun such that he felt like there was a hot cooking pan strapped on his chest. The "chestplate" clanged loudly as it was set aside; it seemed especially loud as the room was empty aside from famous radical abolitionist and soap manufacturer John Brown.

Brown jolted up from hearing the loud noise. He took a deep sigh of relief upon realizing that there was no immediate threat to his life. "Young man, please do be careful with causing a disturbance." Watanabe bowed down in apology and muttered a "sorry" in English. Brown switched to speaking in English upon hearing his mother tongue. "Every Oriental I've come across seems to know the English language."

Watanabe continued conversing in English as well. Despite somehow knowing the language of Gemeinplatz near perfectly, it still felt unnatural for him to use. The same was true for Brown. Perfectly speaking a language that should be perfectly alien to them felt odd, Watanabe likened this feeling to having his brain preprogrammed to make a perfect recreation of a classical painting without having any training in art. That was about the closest he could get with his lackluster understanding of literature (outside of isekai) and metaphors. "Hmm? Almost everyone on Earth knows English. I've seen it since the first year of elementary school. I imagine it's similar for everyone else you've met." Even English, a language he used mostly to browse online, felt more natural to speak. Watanabe had an odd way of speaking, with a passable Cockney accent (thanks to his high school English teacher being an immigrant from London) that sometimes revealed uniquely Japanese restrictions in its phonotactics.

"How interesting. How interesting..." Brown nodded a few times before returning to scribbling on a piece of paper he had on the desk.

“What are you writing, captain?” asked Watanabe, who had nothing better to do at the moment.

“A provisional constitution. I didn’t have time to prepare any due to lacking writing supplies back in Libertycave.” replied Brown casually, as if the act of preparing a constitution was as mundane as taking a walk in the morning. “Right now this town is in a lawless state, nor do we have any legitimacy to rule in the eyes of the people, and we have already had more than a few instances of people committing arson and theft. Apparently the mayor would hear such cases, along with collecting taxes and levies and...” The old man felt his head ache thinking about all this again. “For now, I plan on letting the old system of having an elected mayor and town hall continue as is with an extended franchise.”

“Uh... ‘Franchise’?” To Watanabe, that word was something related to business and not voting.

“Suffrage, the right to vote, it all means the same thing. Ideally we’ll have universal suffrage, along with a congress, a supreme court, and a president.” These were all things that Brown and his company had in the United States had planned for, so he was mostly going off of the Provisional Constitution he had written back then.

The basics weren’t making Brown’s head ache, he was rather worrying about the fact that he was dealing with a completely different political situation. Back in the United States, he had planned for his uprising to be provisional, something to be ended once the federal government banned slavery. Thus the Provisional Constitution was fit for a group of fugitives hiding and fighting in the Appalachian Mountains, a group not intending to build a state.

However, as he had thought of many times before, Gemeinplatz was a completely different beast. Brown didn’t want to get a feudal monarchy to end chattel slavery and be done with it. That just wouldn’t be right, to let there be lords other than the Lord, which was why Brown had switched his strategy and taken a town rather than staying up in Mount Curry. The seemingly obvious answer was to bring democracy to Gemeinplatz, but that came with major problems. First was the fact that the slaves were a minority compared to the rest of Gemeinplatz, which meant that they’d easily get outvoted if anyone decided on re-enslaving them, not to mention rolling back anything resembling racial equality. Second was the fact that Gemeinplatz lacked the infrastructure for democracy in the first place. Just saying “vote for someone!” wasn’t going to work out if there was nothing to stop fraud, bribery, cheating... Both issues needed a transitional period to fix, which was why Brown was making what was only to be a provisional constitution. As for what was in it, “Be patient, young man. You’ll hear of its contents soon enough.”

“Alright, captain.” Watanabe himself felt sleepy. He wasn’t a public speaker, having had to practice for weeks on the speech he gave beforehand, and standing in front of a crowd to play the role of a hero had tired him. He sunk into the sofa, and closed his eyes...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Shinasi was making rounds around Azdavay, doing his duty as a watchman once more. The palisades comprising the town’s defensive walls were much easier to navigate compared to the mountainous terrain of Mount Curry, and Shinasi had made 23 (or 24, he had likely lost count of it at some point) full trips around the raised platform behind the palisades.

He occasionally passed by the soldiers of the League of Gileadites who saluted him every time he passed. Not that he outranked them, there still wasn’t actually a formal military ranking system other than Brown and Ayomide being “captain” and Tubman being “general”, but he had gathered

respect due to his help in the slave uprising at Azdavay. Not that he had done that much with his last-minute help back then, but his veterancy had led to positive rumors about him popping up. “Captain Shinasi” was equally a captain as his counterparts by this point.

Other than the occasional town resident coming to protest them with insults, which Brown had explicitly instructed everyone in the League of Gileadites not to enact unjust punishment against the common people much to the mild annoyance of the soldiery, things were peaceful for now. Anyone who had the power to stop them also dabbled in slavery, which had meant that everyone who had the power to stop them had been hanged yesterday. Shinasi was curious as to what Brown and Tubman were planning on doing next, surely they were not intending to stay idle in this town, but Brown loved to only divulge details of his plans at the last moment only to those who really needed to know said details, and Tubman respected that enough not to leak much.

Shinasi was about to complete his 24th (or 26th?) round around the palisades when he stopped next to a gate upon seeing a group approaching. They were clearly not enemy soldiers considering they had children with them, nor did most of them carry weapons. Rather it was a caravan of people in a rather sorry state, with dirty clothes and tired eyes, who clearly had come travelling here in a rush. There were clearly some nobles among them along with their slaves, but they were all in various states of tired.

“Who are you?” called out Shinasi from his high position.

A well-dressed bloke came forward to reply to Shinasi. “We’re refugees from Casamonu! Please let us in, good sir!” His plea was echoed by many in the group with similar words.

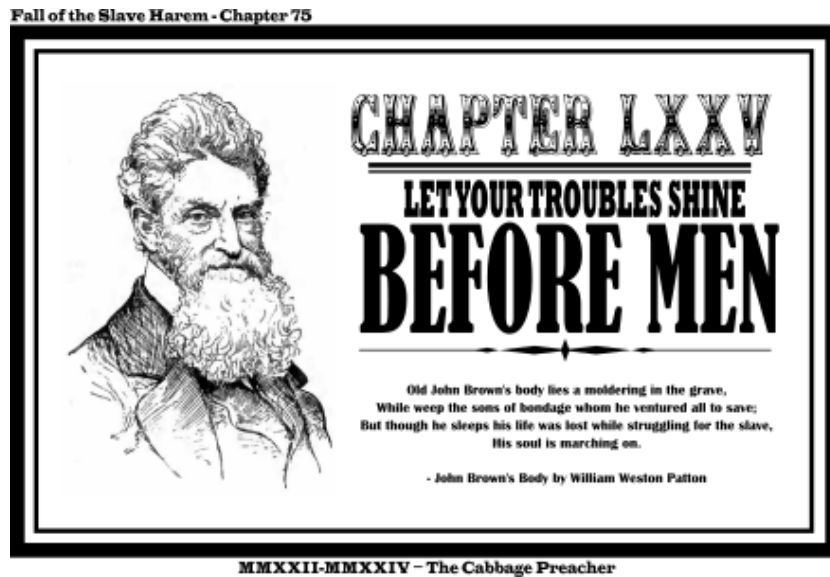
Shinasi remembered something about there being a siege in Casamonu; it made sense that there would be refugees after whatever had happened there. There seemed to be no problem letting them in for now. “Let them in.” he said to a pair of soldiers standing next to the gate. They obliged and opened the door, much to the surprise of the refugees who saw the skin color of the gate’s guards.

“H-huh... Since when did they allow darkskins to be guards?” muttered one befuddled refugee who was the well-dressed bloke from before. “I need to see your manager, this isn’t good for the security of the town!” he complained to Shinasi.

“Oh, them?” Shinasi looked at his comrades-in-arms standing beside him, then he looked at the chained slaves in the caravan and had an idea. “Don’t worry, the mayor needed to cut some costs. It’s a temporary thing. As for your darkskins, could they line up next to their owners? The mayor has a new system to better compensate anyone whose slave escapes, so we need to register them to their owners, otherwise we cannot let you in. The rest of you can go in.”

Desperate and with no other choice, the nobles lined up next to their slaves while the commoners proceeded into the town. After making sure there was no one around, Shinasi talked to the nobles once more. “So, you’re all slaveowners? Glad that we got that out of the way. All your slaves are now free, and you’re all under arrest for theft.”

Chapter 78: Chapter LXXV – Let your troubles shine before men.



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

54th of Summer, 5859 Adventurer's Guild building of Azdavay, Azdavay

A cramped room, a floor dirtied with unspeakable substances, and a mass of unwashed, rowdy folk. Those would be the words that'd describe the adventurers of Azdavay, and the situation inside the guild had only gotten only worse with the influx of newcomers. Those without the means had made their way into the temple, while those who could afford it had lodged themselves into the guild. Not that there were many lodgings left to go around – some were paying money for the right to sleep on the tables (thankfully there were enough tablecloths to not start a backache pandemic in Azdavay).

Shakira, former adventuring companion of Shinasi and veteran of the failed attack on the copper mine, was still staying in Azdavay. Going out the city for a quest was impossible, not with all the patrols on the walls, and she was surviving on her ever-dwindling pay she had received for her service. Her simple lodgings on the upper floor had been downgraded to a third-class table spot, and her booze was getting more and more watered down. With the way things were going, she'd have to reserve herself a spot on the floor of the temple for sleeping. No quests meant to money for Shakira to escape from this situation. Nothing to do, in a state of certain doom...

Growl...

...and she was very hungry. Ordering food here was impossible with all the people around, not to mention the expense. She'd have to head out in search for some, though heading out proved to be a challenge by in itself. Shakira jumped on the table, carefully maneuvered around a sleeping man and his extended family who had lodged themselves on the table, and then she squeezed through the crowd to make it to fresh air outside. From there it was a short walk to the temple, where there would usually be a soup kitchen open. Shakira saw the usual set up in front of the temple: a giant metal pot, inscribed with blessings from various priests over centuries, heated over an open fire to make some variety of gruel. "Nourish thine fellow believer" and all that as commanded by the Divine, a command oft ignored by anyone other than a handful of welldoers.

There was one oddity about the soup kitchen today, though it wasn't odd enough to stop Shakira from getting her own fill and sitting on the street along with the other poor folk. "Why are there darkskins working here?" asked a stranger who had chanced next to Shakira. "Does the temple of this town employ slaves?"

The stranger was just asking a rhetorical question, not one that she expected to get an answer to, but Shakira had the answer. "The temple didn't have slaves, and they'd all be dead now if they had it. Are you from around here?"

"No, we just arrived from Casamonu. I'm Azra, by the way. You are?"

"Shakira of Yellowclover, I've been to Casamonu a few times. How's it going there?" Small chat was the way forward in Gemeinplatz, as there was a lack of newspapers or other means to gather information about distant lands. Hence any travelers would be bombarded with questions by any curious folk like Shakira.

"It's terrible, I tell you." Azra took a sip from her bowl of gruel as if she was sipping tea. The gruel wasn't too far off from what she had been eating on the road for a few days, and she had gotten used to its taste. "There was a siege, you probably heard of that through the grapevine, but then the new count apparently completely disappeared. All the noblemen he left behind began fighting with each other for the county. The city was in anarchy by the time I managed to gather enough odds and ends to wing it out the city."

"Bloody hell!" exclaimed Shakira. Everything seemed to be falling apart recently.

"So, what's with the darkskins?" asked Azra once more. She was eyeing them nervously. "They separated the slaveowners in our caravan once we entered. Something about registering the slaves."

"Oh, I don't think you're going to be seeing those poor slaveowners ever again." replied Shakira. Azra looked shocked as she expected, but she didn't look horrified at the prospect. She was more in disbelief rather than anything. "I was as surprised as you are. A bunch of fugitives entered the town and deposed the mayor, and then they hanged everyone who owned slaves."

Azra looked around her, examining the town once more. She slowly took a sip filled with disbelief. "Just the slaveowners?" It was as if the existence of the town was surprising to her.

"Yeah, everyone's got their gussets in a twist, but nobody else has been harmed." Saying this out loud, Shakira realized how odd this statement was as well. Azdavay had been in an apocalyptic mood just a few days ago, but now they were doing just fine. "There was this Hero who declared that the Demon King was coming and that he was uniting the land for a final fight or something." Still, self-declared heroes were about as common as self-declared messiahs, so Shakira wasn't about to get excited over some otherworlder in fancy armor.

"A Hero?!" Azra almost spilled her bowl of gruel. "Is that true?"

"M-maybe? Possibly?" Shakira shrugged. She didn't want to shatter the hopes of this young girl. "Go ask the priests, I'm not the authority on this."

"The rest of my family is still stuck in Casamonu, do you think the Hero could save them?"

"Again, ask the priests for Divine's sake. Or just ask the Hero directly, I don't know." Shakira hadn't been the most attentive in the temple lectures regarding their messianic hero archetype.

“I will!” Azra gulped down the rest of the gruel, shoving the empty bowl in the hand of some local priest before making her way to... somewhere. Shakira was unsure where she was considering that Azra probably didn’t know where this “Hero” was. She mumbled something about “today’s youth” before proceeding to finish her own bowl.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

54th of Summer, 5859
(Former) Mayor’s Office of Azdavay, Azdavay (Azdavay)

Only a bit of time had passed since Watanabe had closed his eyes. Waking up, he saw Brown and Tubman slouched over a map on the mayor’s grand desk. They were having some sort of discussion that was going way above Watanabe’s head, so he decided to ignore them and relax on the sofa without a care in the world. Due to the nature of rebellion and whatnot they’d surely have something to worry about in the future, so why not relax now when there was no trouble?

Knock, knock!

Whoever had knocked on the door, it was probably something that concerned Brown or Tubman. He got even more comfortable on the sofa, sinking himself in further. Shinasi opened the door, excusing himself in. “There’s some girl asking to meet the Hero. What do I do with her?”

“Me?” Watanabe lazily moved his head to look at Shinasi. “Why would anyone want to meet me?”

“You’re supposed to be our front for convincing the common people of Gemeinplatz, Watanabe. Of course you’ll be seeing them!” replied John Brown. “Young man, get on your costume and go meet her as long as she isn’t, God forbid, some assassin.”

“She’s already on the other side of the door, captain.” Shinasi was pushed aside to make way for Azra. She immediately spotted the otherworlder in the room, who was a man slouched on the couch like an empty sack of potatoes. Watanabe quickly got up and combed his hair with his bare hands to look a modicum of presentable.

“Sir Hero!” She gave the “hero” a military salute. “I have come to petition you and give you a quest!”

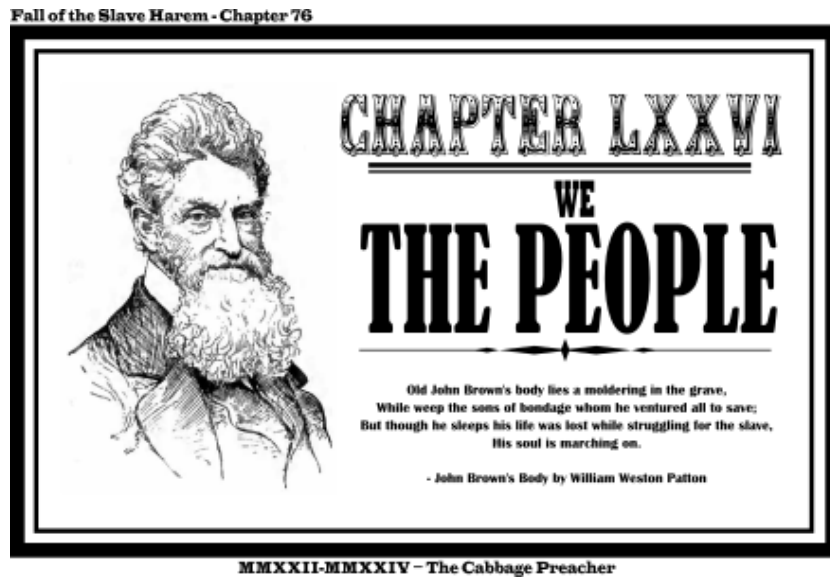
“I’m glad to listen to a charming lady like you.” Watanabe debated whether he should kiss her hand or something to complete the hero act, but he shied away. Even shaking hands seemed too intimate an act for a man used to greeting people by bowing. “What malady has befallen you, milady?” Old Brown covered his face in shame upon hearing someone use the word “milady” unironically. That word was, to him, only to be found in Shakespearean place and nothing more, and it seemed a bit “cringe” as one late Jacob would describe it.

“My family is stuck in Casamonu, where anarchy reigns supreme after the count disappeared!” Brown and Tubman suddenly got a whole lot more interested upon hearing of regional instability in their local area. “Please, o’ Hero, lead your armies and save the poor people of my town!”

Watanabe was unsure as to what he wanted to do. They had just taken a town, and he wasn’t sure whether the League of Gileadites was ready to go on the offensive once more. He couldn’t ask it directly due to the girl being right next to him, so he turned his gaze to Brown and Tubman for affirmation. Brown wasn’t giving a thumbs-up, due to the thumbs-up not being popularized until after he had passed away, but he was giving an OK sign which Watanabe understood.

“Don’t worry milady, we’ll be marching our armies to save the people of Casamonu!”

Chapter 79: Chapter LXXVI – We the people.



55th of Summer, 5859 (Former) Mayor's Dining Room of Azdavay, Azdavay (Azdavay)

Every politician needs to entertain their guests, and the late mayor of Azdavay was no exception. His dining room was quite a sight to behold, with a wide open space only occupied by a grand table that certainly had cost quite a lot of money. Illuminating the room would be a chandelier if not for the fact that the new occupants of this dining room didn't know how to operate it. The former mayor would have probably died from shock instead of asphyxiation if he had seen his dining room be filled with fugitives. There was no fancy food unfortunately, save for some choosing to eat some flatbread and hard [tack](#) while listening in, but the room contained someone much more attention-grabbing than fancy dining.

"I'm glad to have you fine folk here." Brown had found himself at a spot in the corner of the room, which had prompted the people inside the room to scoot the chairs towards his direction. The fine mahogany floors of the dining room had been ruined by all this scooting, but there was nobody around who cared about that.

Brown took a look at the crowd around him before he continued speaking. There certainly was a whole lot more people. Libertycave already had a population of more than two-hundred before they left; now some of the liberated slaves around Azdavay had joined up to swell their ranks to a thousand. The rest of the liberated slaves had either decided to take ownership of the now ownerless plantations or stay away from the military side of liberation, which them not wanting to take a risk just after getting their liberty was understandable. Still, this was a far cry from the days of yore when they were nothing but a dozen strangers escaping from Azdavay.

"We have made it far, thank the Lord for having protected us in our arduous journey. But let us not rest or idle! While celebrations have been in order, Azdavay is just the beginning of the beginning. I know not how many still toil in the fields and mines of this realm, but there are many of your brothers and sisters that await you. We must not stop here; we shall not stop here. You might have heard rumors of strife in Casamonu, and let me tell you that those rumors are true. We have been

graciously spared only by the lords fighting amongst themselves. The moment they stop fighting will be the moment that they come together to snuff out our spark of rebellion.”

The thought of their rebellion being snuffed out caused quite the commotion, especially amongst the new members, who definitely didn’t want to go back to their old form of employment. The older members had heard similar thoughts and speeches from Brown already, but the thought still terrified them.

Brown waited for the crowd to calm down before speaking once more. “Our enemies are currently disorganized. Yet, I’ll be honest, we are similarly disorganized to them. The ‘League of Gileadites’ is currently a concept that amounts to nothing but a vague notion of us being grouped together. This was more than enough to enter Azdavay, but will it be enough to break through the walls of Casamonu? What about all the other cities of Gemeinplatz?” He took out a particularly large roll of paper from under his coat and unfurled it. “Therefore, after long deliberation with General Tubman, we have drafted this constitution for the League of Gileadites as a starting place.” The paper was quite long, with it written in Latin script on one side and the local Gemeinplatz script on the other. It was so long in fact that Tubman was holding it on the other hand to keep it straight, not that anyone in the room could read it in the first place. “With your approval, it shall come into effect.”

Being the only person literate in Latin script, Brown was left with the task of reading the constitution out loud. “We, as members of the League of Gileadites, hereby declare that Gemeinplatz belongs to all those living in it, and that the people of Gemeinplatz have been robbed of their birthright of liberty and equality. Therefore, we have united together in this League and adopted this Provisional Constitution to protect our inalienable rights for the time being.”

Article I: All persons who of mature age, and their dependents, who agree to uphold and enforce the provisional constitution shall be accepted into the League.

Article II: Decision-making shall be done through a Council, which shall be composed of a majority of the adult members of the League and gather regularly for voting. The Council has the right to make ordinances for the general good as long as it doesn’t go against the constitution.

Article III: The Council shall elect, through a majority vote, a President whom shall faithfully execute the decisions made by the council, and a Commander-in-Chief who shall lead the League in all military affairs. They shall hold office for three years unless the Council elects to remove them through a majority vote.

Article IV: The President, with the Commander-in-Chief; shall, immediately upon entering on the duties of their office, give special attention to secure from amongst their own people, men of integrity, intelligence, and good business habits and capacity, and, above all, of first-rate moral character and influence, to act as civil officers of every description and grade, as well as teachers, priests, physicians, surgeons, mechanics, agents of every description, clerks, and messengers.

Article V: It shall be the duty of the President and Commander-in-Chief to find out (as soon as possible) the real friends as well as enemies of the League in every part of the country; to secure among them innkeepers, messengers, adventurers, otherworlders, and agents, through whom may be obtained correct and regular information constantly; recruits for the service, places of deposit and sale, together with all needed supplies; and it shall be matter of special regard to secure such facilities throughout Gemeinplatz.

Article VI: It shall be the duty of all officers of the League to name candidates of merit, for office or elevation to the Commander-in-Chief who shall be the appointing power of the army; and all

commissions of military officers shall bear the signatures of the Commander in-Chief.

Article VII: All money, jewelry or other articles captured by honorable warfare, found, taken, or confiscated, belonging to the enemy, shall be held sacred to constitute a safety fund; and any person who shall improperly retain, dispose of, hide, use, or destroy such money or other article above named, contrary to the provisions and spirit of this article, shall be deemed guilty of theft, and, on conviction thereof, shall be punished accordingly.

Article VIII: No person, after having surrendered himself or herself a prisoner, and who shall properly demean himself or herself as such, to any officer or private connected with this organization, shall afterward be put to death, or be subject to any corporeal punishment, without first having had the benefit of a fair and impartial trial; nor shall any prisoner be treated with any kind of cruelty, disrespect, insult, or needless severity; but it shall be the duty of all persons, male and female, connected herewith, at all times and under all circumstances, to treat all such prisoners with every degree of respect and kindness that the nature of the circumstances will admit of, and to insist on a like course of conduct from all others.

Article IX: No two of the offices specially provided for by this instrument shall be filled by the same person at the same time.

Article X: Every officer, civil or military, connected with the League shall, before entering upon the duties of his office, make solemn oath or affirmation to abide by and support this provisional constitution and these ordinances; also every citizen and soldier, before being fully recognized as such, shall do the same.

...

The president of this convention shall convene, immediately on the adoption of this instrument, a convention of all such persons as shall have given their adherence to the constitution, who shall proceed to fill, by election, all offices specially named in said constitution, the president of this convention presiding, and issuing commissions to such officers elect; all such officers being thereafter elected in the manner provided in the body of this instrument.

It took a while for Brown read all the articles. Thankfully, he had brought a big cup of water to sip when his old throat got hoarse. There were a few more minor articles, mostly minor ones delineating some separation of powers and secretaries and ministers, but Brown quickly skipped over those as to not tire out the already tired audience in the room. Their attention was grabbed once more when Brown asked the most important question of the day: "So, you have heard of the constitution. Before we move on to the voting, does anyone have any questions or proposed amendments?"

One hand was raised, that hand belonging to Watanabe. "Captain, I thought that this was supposed to be a constitution for the League. But, it sounds more like the constitution of a country."

Brown couldn't help but smile at the question. "Of course, that is exactly what we are achieving here. Ladies and gentlemen, all of you here, you are witnessing the birth of a new country in Gemeinplatz, no matter what its final name will take after this provisional constitution is amended."

This caused a storm throughout the previously disinterested audience. All of them had the vague feeling that they needed to replace the Empire of Gemeinplatz with something else, but most of

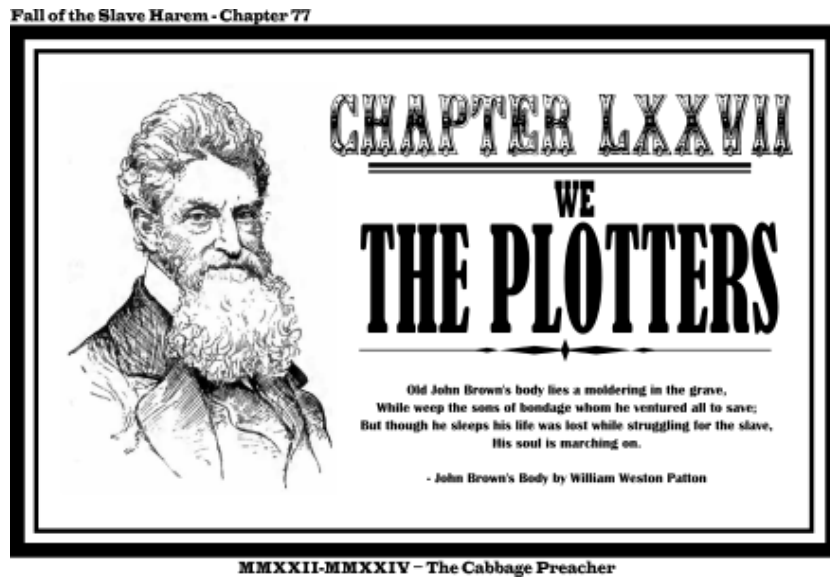
them had yet to consciously come to that realization. “Constitutional convention” was a term that was alien to almost all in the room.

Watanabe sat down after having his questioned answered. “Any other questions, objections, proposals?” There seemed to be none at the moment; the articles of this constitution weren’t too dissimilar to how the League already informally operated. “Then, let us move to the voting. Those who are in favor of adopting this constitution, raise your hands!”

Almost everyone in the room, aside from those very little few who wanted something like a monarchy to continue, raised their hands in approval.

Today, on 55 Summer 5859, a new republic was formed in Gemeinplatz.

Chapter 80: Chapter LXXVII – We the plotters.



55th of Summer, 5859
???, ???

Sunlight shined through a stained glass window, making an impression on the table below while dust danced under it. Depicted on the window was a simple scene – divine light at top shining down on a man who held a scepter and wore a crown. Such divine light was reserved for one man of course, with the rest of the peasants in the scene having to suffice with sunlight to toil under. Thus the world had been made, for earth for the peasants to stand on and peasants for the big man at top to stand on.

It was this scene that an old man was appreciating. His forehead was barren and wrinkled, so was his face, yet he had determination on that old face. Not the determination akin to that found in a hero, but a determination akin to that found in a rat going through the tightest of spaces to escape and prolong its life no matter what.

To the outside observer however, this man was far away from a rat. He was a well-bred well-dressed bloke, a gentleman, an intellectual. A man of certain taste in architecture, the type to pause to appreciate a stained glass window. The type to make plans to rebuild the building he inhabited in his image. Forget the building, he'd rebuild the entire city that the building was in. He would build, rebuild, and rebuild some more, until there was nothing to do but re-rebuild. A utopia, yes, he'd make a utopia out of these ignoramuses.

“Spear, are you staring at walls again?” It was the voice of a younger man, coming out of the shadows to be enlightened under the stained glass. He was much well-dressed than Spear, though not as well-dressed as he could be if he had to. There was no need to dress fancily while in one's home.

“I was just pondering, my Leader.” replied Spear, clapping his boots together. He had readied himself to give a salute that he didn't need to give, and the clap of the boots awkwardly echoed throughout the corridor.

“As you always do.” The man beckoned Spear to follow him. He seemed to be going nowhere in particular. “What is it that you were pondering?”

“Architecture. I was thinking on how I could rebuilt the capital.” Spear inspected the brick walls and marble floors of the room while following the man. “Everything here is so different. I’ve had to rethink how I can realize my projects with the limited resources in Gemeinplatz.” Spear couldn’t help but stifle a laughter upon saying “Gemeinplatz”. It was such a silly and nonsensical name if one knew what the two words composing it meant. “Still, I have many things planned if I am to ever receive approval and a proper budget.”

“We could do many things if we were to only receive a proper budget.” The man sighed. “Yet, the only thing that the noblemen do is bicker amongst themselves. Such a sad state of affairs, isn’t it? How did you manage to deal with such things back home?”

“We shot anyone who complained. Even better, we apprehended dissenters and made them labor for our grand projects.” Such irony delighted both of them equally, so much so that they were laughing wholeheartedly.

“Oh, only if I could do that, Spear. Only if I could...” The man slumped his shoulders, looking all dejected. “*I could*, but then I’d find my head rolling on these floors.”

“That won’t do, would it? No, it wouldn’t. It won’t do, my Leader. It shouldn’t. You shouldn’t give yourself in to these traitors. You *are* the leader. You have all the right to drive anyone away who dares go against your will. One will. One realm. One leader. Not many wills fighting each other.”

Spear’s words seemed to mesmerize the man, who had walked a great distance without even thinking. Thankfully they had more than enough space to loiter around all they wanted all day long. “Yes, to move this fractured realm into greatness to... to... to unite all under me. To move to an era of peace where the realm shan’t bicker with itself.”

“Yes, that’s most beneficial for the folk of the realm.” replied Spear. “To submit to the will of an absolute and wise ruler, that is what’s beneficial to everyone.”

“Wise words as always, Spear.” With all the talk they had done a whole lot of walk, ending up in front of Spear’s office. “Only if every one of my vassals were as amicable...”

Spear put a hand on the man’s shoulders. Opposed to his own clean-shaven face, the young man in front of him had the beginning of a beard as if he was trying to compensate for his lack of age. His eyes were all focused on Spear, listening to his trusted advisor intently. Spear had learned how effective a good, deep stare into another’s eyes were from his former leader. The kid in front of him had none of that, no charisma, no wisdom, no experience in leadership... One could see that from how he completely trusted the political adversary right in front of him. The young man was ready to be molded like putty by Spear. “That’ll change soon, my Leader. Have you heard the news coming from the west?”

The young man shook his head. “There are many news coming every day from everywhere. I cannot keep track of them all.”

“That’s why I’m your steward. Ever since I was summoned to Gemeinplatz, keeping track of all this has been my only job.” Spear cleared his throat, and looked around him to make sure nobody was around to listen. The corridor leading to his office was empty. “A group of lords in Casamonu rebelled over concerns of a slave rebellion, which materialized in a border town.” Azdavay was so

insignificant that its name had been lost travelling through the grapevine. “Your other ministers are trying to keep this news from leaking fearing that it might spread panic, but they likely won’t be able to hold back the rumors once the first wave of refugees arrive... especially as I’ve hired a few people to make sure that this leaks out to the general public.”

The young man was perplexed by the last part. “Spread panic? Why?”

Spear simply laughed at the naïve question. “Excuse me... Ahem. It’s simple: Panic is a tool, a tool that can be efficiently wielded to gain power. My previous Leader had his men burn down the diet, a type of royal court on Örf, controlled by his own allies. Then he publicly blamed his enemies for the attack and he simply purged them for the good of the realm. Of course, there’s no need to actually set fire to anything for this to work. As long as the folk is scared enough...”

“...I- I get it.”

“Good. Just follow my advice; it’ll be obvious when the time comes.” Spear let go of the young man’s shoulder. “Now, my Leader... Or, should I call you Your Imperial Majesty? Your Imperial Majesty, if you’ll excuse me, I have duties to attend to as your faithful steward.”

The Emperor nodded in approval to Spear’s request, and they parted ways as Spear entered his office. It was an office quite unlike any other in Gemeinplatz, being quite plain and utilitarian. There was a desk for Spear to work on with a set of filing cabinets next to it, and another larger table for him to use for planning. That large table had a pretty big plan on it: A city model lovingly handcrafted by Spear. Simple, symmetrical buildings made of marble, granite and concrete. Plenty of triumphal arcs, grand pillars, and a grand hall in the middle with an enormous dome that’d need the work of several wizards to hold it up.



Spear watched his magnificent model city from above. He had unfinished business, a business which he’d finish here: to build the perfect city. For that, he needed to build the foundation of a perfect state for his perfect city to stand on, and to build that perfect state he’d need to do

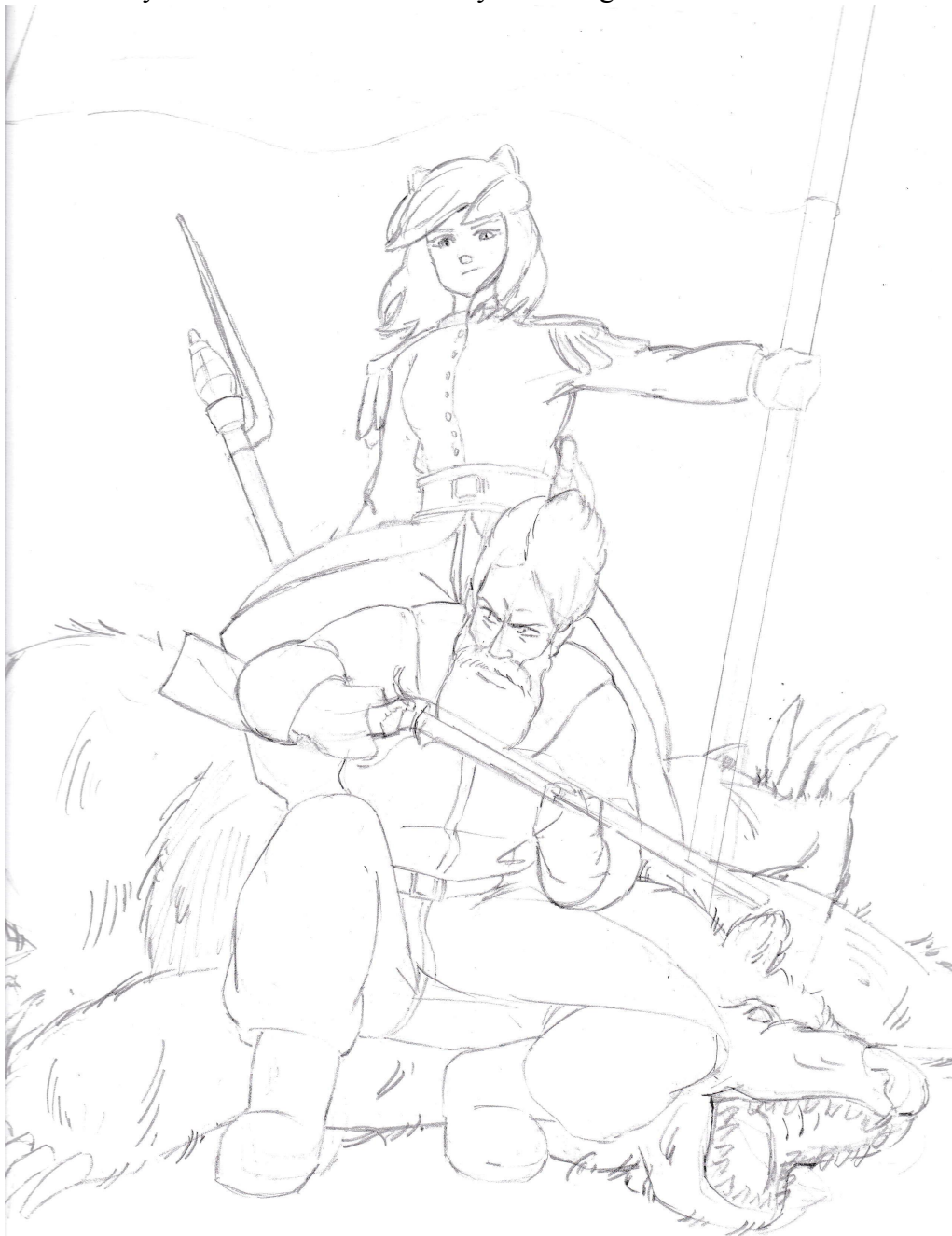
something other than look at this model all day. He turned back to his desk to do some work only to notice that somebody had made a delivery on his desk. It was a nameplate with Spear's name and title on it. He disliked how his surname had been mispronounced in Gemeinplatz, but he had to make do with the people here:

SIR ALBERT SPEAR OF MANNHEIM

Imperial Architect and Steward of Gemeinplatz

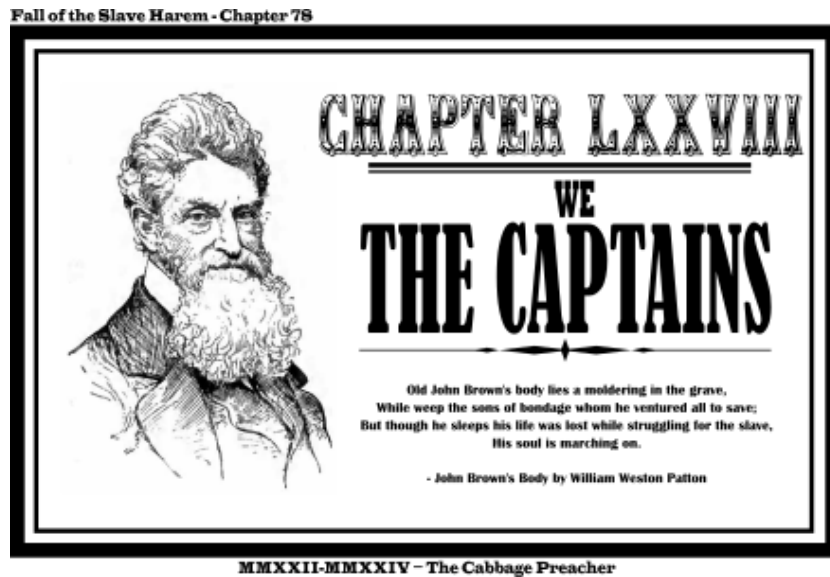
The old man turned the nameplate to face the door and got back to work...

On other news, the John Brown Isekai has more fanart. Thank ye No-Analyst-4821 for the awesome Ayomide art with her staff-bayonet-thing!



(The artwork was originally posted [here](#), on [r/JohnBrownIsekai](#))

Chapter 81: Chapter LXXVIII – We the captains.



55th of Summer, 5859 Commander-in-Chief's Office, Azdavay

The former mayor's office had found new purpose as the office of old John Brown. Not much had changed in the office though – Brown wasn't expecting to stay here for much longer.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen." Commander-in-Chief John Brown greeted the newly appointed captains that were seated around him in a semi-circular fashion akin to a half-eaten donut. "I think we all know why we're all gathered here."

"Are we planning on sieging Casamonu?" asked Ayomide, former maid café worker turned revolutionary catgirl wizard turned captain. "Isn't it a bit too quick? We've barely settled down here, what if we get kicked out of this town when we march out?"

"Quickly, quietly, and efficiently. That's how we should operate, young lady. We should strike while the lords are in a tussle amongst themselves."

"I've spent some time in the Adventurer's Guild, talking to people there and learning what they think. The people there don't seem to be looking to cause trouble, rather they're just surprised that they're still alive. I think we'll do fine if we leave a small garrison." replied Shinasi, former winesop adventurer turned winesop captain.

"That is true as well. If I was back home, we'd be having people shooting at us from every street corner if the slaves rose up and took control of their town." Brown had assumed that their job would be much harder, but the common populace was seemingly more interested in obeying whoever was in charge rather than fighting for some vague notion of racial superiority, at least for now. "Those people would rather burn their whole town down if it meant that their town stayed 'pure'."

"Those people never went away, unfortunately." added General Tubman, whose title hadn't changed. "May the Lord have mercy on us."

“And may the Lord have mercy on us if we do not liberate each and every last person on Gemeinplatz, or die on the way to that goal, for that is the least we can do. Ahem!” Brown exclaimed to get their attention back to the point. “Our faith will be dead without works, so let us return to the liberation of Casamonu. Now that our ranks have swelled to over a thousand, it is prudent that we organize our forces accordingly so that we may fight efficiently. We have four people here including me. That means that each of us will lead a company of troops, each company being around two hundred and fifty men. Of course, you shouldn’t lead every troop personally: 250 men are hard to manage just by yourself. Thus, you should select a few able men as officers and let those lead platoons of around a hundred within your company, and let those officers select their own trusted officers to lead smaller squads if the need arises during combat. We’ll be setting off in a week, so you should be quick to act.”

“One week is barely enough time. We haven’t even begun training the newly freed slaves that joined us.” To be truthful, Ayomide had slacked off thinking that they’d be staying in Azdavay for a while. She hadn’t drilled anyone ever since the town had fell.

“Then you should train them quickly. A week is more than enough to make them capable of marching in formation, especially if the veterans in their company advise them.” Brown would have begun work on a drill manual for the League if not for the fact that he neither had the time or writing implements to do so, not to mention that there seemed to be no printing press of any sort to copy such a manual if he did write it. “In fact, all of you should identify and separate the veterans in your companies for such a purpose and get to drilling as soon as possible.”

Shinasi had a query. “What about volunteers from Azdavay, captain? Should we accept them and drill them as well? I’ve seen one or two people at least who wanted to volunteer to help our ‘hero’. There are also some adventurers who’ve asked me if they could sign up and acquire themselves some loot.”

“No, no we won’t be having any mercenaries, especially not any of those glorified bandits who are looking for plunder. However, we do need some auxiliaries for logistical purposes. The pack animals we got from that caravan won’t be enough to carry all the supplies we need for a thousand people, paying some people to carry our supplies would help with that problem. Same with the volunteers - let them carry supplies. Young man, if you could, you should also look if anyone is willing to sell any beasts of burden. Those are as crucial as the spears we hold; no army will march and fight on an empty stomach.”

“Understood, captain.”

Brown paused for a moment, thinking if there was anything he missed. The room was silent, not eerily so, as everyone was planning on what they’d begin doing. Next week would be a very busy week for everyone. “Well, this has been a productive session of discussion. I can see that you’re all already busy, so let us spare no more words and get to action.”

Quietly they all stood up from their seats to get on with business.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

56th of Summer, 5859
Adventurer’s Guild of Azdavay Building of Azdavay, Azdavay (Azdavay)

Things should have been quieter than before in the Adventurer's Guild building in Azdavay. Sure, there were still many adventurers visiting to and fro in the building, but their sudden visitors had slowly trickled out. Some had established tents and other temporary housing outside the building, others had found relatives to stay with, and the rest had been evacuated by the League of Gileadites to the emptied houses of the permanently vacationing slaveowners.

Shakira should have had some peace and quiet on her sleeping table for once if not for the fact that the League had gotten up to something odd again. A line had formed leading to the guild's receptionist, who was frantically dancing her quill on paper to register everyone. Having newly woken up, Shakira was quite curious as to what could cause such a crowd. She couldn't read the quest board itself, so she entered the line herself and whispered to the stranger in front of her. "Hey, do you know why so many people are in line?"



The man shrugged. "I don't know myself. I assumed that it was a high-paying job so I followed everyone else."

"I see..." Shakira wasn't all too surprised to see that the herd of adventurers had followed each other. The line did smell of potential profit though, so Shakira was obviously going to follow the Adventurer's Code and go where the money presumably was. Slowly the line went closer and closer to the desk until Shakira was face-to-face with the receptionist, who looked tired from having seen a load of people and full of despair from having to process even more like her.

"I'm here for... uh... whatever all the other people were lining up for." said Shakira.

Thankfully the receptionist was more than capable of inferring what her vague request was. "The logistical job posted by the fugitives? Do you have any useful magic, like hydromancy or pyromancy?"

Shakira unsheathed her ridiculously large slab of steel that she used as a sword. "I have this massive blade?"

"...is that a form of magic?" The receptionist's bored tone was dropped for an impressed one when she examined the sword which was the same size as the woman holding it. "How are you even holding that?"

“Eh, I got used to it.”

“...okay, I guess you can help guard others and carry heavy items.” The receptionist noted down her qualifications down to a small piece of paper, not that Shakira could read what she was writing down. “Take this paper to the fugitives gathering in the town center and listen to whatever they say. Next!”

Shakira was quickly pushed out by the next person in line, not that she intended to stay in place. She made her way out of the building, to the narrow streets and from there to the town square. The once wide open square had become quite crowded with jobseekers and those seeking to profit from the jobseekers. The square was already often inhabited by merchants and other businessmen, and some had set up stalls to sell goods to those who were about to go on campaign. An enterprising individual had even set up nine pins on the sidewalk for those who wanted to bowl while waiting.

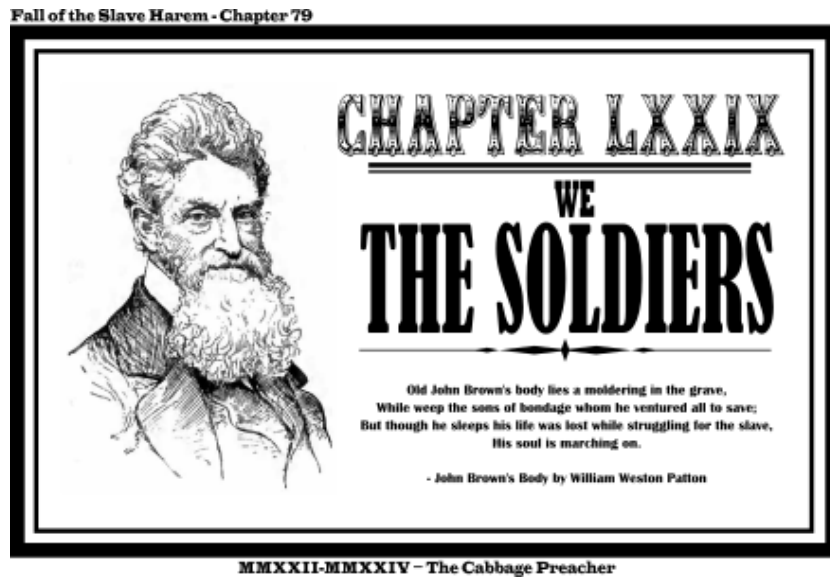
Unfortunately, Shakira would have no time for a round of bowling. An old guy who seemed to be some sort of important figure for the fugitives rode to the square on his horse, followed by some soldiers also on horseback. Despite his seemingly important stature, the old man had simply donned on a leather coat and a straw hat. Even the soldiers clad in gambeson and copper helmets seemed even fancier than him. He sort of seemed familiar to Shakira, but she couldn't quite put her finger on it. Old men with flowing beards were aplenty; there was no surprise that he'd look sort of familiar no matter who he was, or so Shakira thought to explain away this odd familiarity. For her, there was something even odder about this fellow: “Why is a lightskin riding along with the darkskins?” Shakira thought that he was either getting paid a lot or that he was just doing whatever would get him power. Those were pretty understandable motivations for an adventurer like Shakira, so she wasn't judging him for it.

Meanwhile John Brown, famous abolitionist and the infamous old man riding a horse, was taking a good look at the new recruits. There were a lot of people for a small town like Azdavay, mostly due to the fact that Azdavay was full of adventurers looking to earn cash in the frontier. Whether that money came from slaying slimes, hunting fugitives, or aiding an abolitionist slime soap maker mattered not. Brown detested that attitude, but educating people on how to be less materialistic would come after abolishing slavery and destroying the Empire.

“Good, thank the Lord, it seems that we have a lot of people here. We'll be assigning everyone here auxiliary jobs based on your skills.” Brown was speaking in a rushed tone to go back to the army outside the walls of Azdavay. Every moment was precious this week, even more so than time usually is.

“Follow me, ladies and gentleman. Be quick now. We have a very long and busy road ahead.”

Chapter 82: Chapter LXXIX – We the soldiers.



57th of Summer, 5859

Some field right outside of town where there's currently a lot of people, Azdavay/Casamonu

Ayomide wanted to tear her gambeson off.

The endless rain had ended in Casamonu, only for the sun to rear its ugly head once the clouds dispersed. Now it was pure heat and no moisture, the sun unimpeded to rain on her parade. Even the ground itself felt like it could cook Ayomide's feet, yet wearing boots was only mildly more pleasant than the alternative. The mountain was cool, chill, scenic... Ayomide concluded that coming down the mountain was the worst decision in John Brown's career. Why couldn't the old man cool his balding head off and chill in the mountains?

Regardless of her thoughts on the weather, Captain Ayomide had a job to do. The slaver lords in Casamonu were certainly not waiting for fair weather like she rather would, and the weather certainly would be the last of Ayomide's concerns if she were to be returned to slavery. Ayomide would rather not bother with being enslaved again, that was for sure, so she'd have to bother with the troops.

"Halt!"

The soldiers did as ordered by Ayomide, forming a line of spears that was two ranks deep. These soldiers were the crème de la crème of Libertycave, which didn't amount to too much compared to a career soldier like a knight. Their equipment didn't inspire too much confidence either. Some of the soldiers had gotten an upgrade through weaponry seized from Azdavay's garrison, mostly semi-rusted iron junk, but the rest had to make do with copper spears. The situation was dreadful in the other companies, some men having to fashion weapons out of brooms and pitchforks due to their suddenly swelling ranks from the freed slaves. Ayomide truly wondered whether Brown had lost his mind and forgot that even divine intervention from the Aunt of God or whatever wouldn't help them win a siege if all some had were pitchforks and hopes and dreams.

"Square up!"

Once again, as they had done countless times before, the men rushed themselves into a square. They took less than a minute now, and the amount of people injured by someone else's spear bumping into them had been reduced to negligible amounts. Not to mention that the square was more square-like; Ayomide had to squint only a little bit to see the perfect square of her dreams appear. It was a beautiful sight to see after all the effort she and the men had put in. Maybe with beautiful squares like these they could successfully siege down Casamonu... or not as Ayomide quickly realized that beautiful squares couldn't bring down city walls.

"...what's the old man going to pull out his pants this time?" wondered Ayomide while looking at the square. Squares, shapes, circles, donuts... Ayomide was getting quite hungry after running around all day. "You're dismissed for now. Make sure to assemble once more before lunch!" With her command the lovely square dissolved into two hundred and fifty people, which caused a modicum of chaos as they tried to find their way around. There were men from other units as well who were either training or cooking who were affected by the dissolution of this great mass until things settled down and all was calm.

Ayomide suddenly felt someone poke her from behind. She was about to utterly obliterate whoever it was until she noticed that it was Shinasi. "Shinasi?!"

"Sorry for the poke, I was calling out to you for a while. I guess you were enamored with the squares." Shinasi handed Ayomide a hearty chunk of fresh hardtack. "I was wondering if you were hungry."

"I was. I very much was." Ayomide received the hardtack and bit on it. It was hard as its name suggested, but it was all that they'd have for when they'd be on the road. Their cooking friend had been left behind to serve the people in Libertycave. "Thank you." Still, hardtack as a free woman felt better than anything she could have back in the maid café.

"It feels odd to see Azdavay from outside, doesn't it?" Shinasi took a bite out of his own portion "I've been using this place as a base for adventuring, but... Well, let's say that I never expected to be here."

"Me neither. I was dreaming of one day escaping to Zon'guldac at best. Becoming part of a slave rebellion never occurred even in my wildest of fever dreams."

"Your fever dreams must have been tame then. I've become the Hero, slain a couple dragons, saved a handful of princesses and saved the world just in one dream alone." said Shinasi in a proud tone that suggested he was boasting about his achievements in dreamland.

Ayomide didn't look too impressed. The last piece of her hardtack crumpled in her mouth. "Good job, o' almighty Hero. Those dream dragons must have been terrifying. Lady Orange shall give you a fitting plot of land to cultivate and declare you her knight."

"Hey, ambition is the first step to success. You cannot begin slaying dragons without dreaming of slaying them in the first place, which means that I'm on the first step to slaying a dragon!" Shinasi, the potential dragon slayer and world saver, handed another bunch of hardtack to Ayomide. "Would you like some more?"

"You should be a bit careful with all this food, you know. We might have a lot in stock, but it'd be quite troublesome if we outgrew these clothes." Nevertheless, Ayomide accepted the offer of more food even if she was feeling full. She'd be a fool to reject free stuff.

“That’d just mean there’s more of you, right? That wouldn’t be all that bad. Maybe I should get some more?” Shinasi teasingly poked at the waist of his close comrade.

“Dear Shinasi, with all sincerity, you have to learn how to selectively think about what to release from that brain of yours to the outside world.” Ayomide briefly paused to think. “Anyways, if you *really* want me to get me food, find some donuts.”

“...what are ‘donuts’?”

Ayomide shrugged. “You have to find out.” She still didn’t exactly know either.

“Ah, a quest! I’m good at doing those.” Shinasi drew his spear and donned his shield. “I’ll see you after I find out what a ‘donut’ is!” He ran off to the distance, leaving her alone while he ventured on his grand quest.

Now being in solitude, Ayomide took a look around her. The field where their army had setup was quite large as it was an abandoned set of farming plots. Housing, if it could be called that, had already been erected, consisting of stacks of hay protected by leaves and cloth held up by sticks. In the middle was the command center, which was an actual tent where the captains and officers could meet up and stand around a table looted from the mayor’s office.

Men were training near the command tent, the new recruits being thought on simple matters of using a spear and throwing it aided by the veterans. Thankfully doing both weren’t hard tasks to comprehend and be proficient enough in, especially since individual martial skill wasn’t all that important when troops were ordered in a formation. Training was a success as long as they could stand in a line, hold up their shields and skewer the enemy when the time came. Thus training how to operate in a formation was given way more importance and time in the camp.

Outside of the training and resting men, there was a group that caught Ayomide’s eyes. They were an unarmed group who were doing something that she didn’t even understand how to describe in the first place, with Rabanowicz rambling something while Watanabe drew on the ground with a stick. There were also a few freemen watching out of curiosity, and Ayomide was about to join that crowd.



“Monsieur! You’re doing it wrong, ‘diameter’ and ‘radius’ are two different things!” Rabanowicz snatched the drawing stick from Watanabe’s hand. She drew a circle on the ground divided in half by a line going through it. She etched a dot in the middle of the circle. “The diameter is this straight line passing through the dot in the center of the circle, from one perimeter to the other on the farthest end. The radius is half of this line, the segment starting from the center to the perimeter. Simple, isn’t it? I don’t get how you can confuse this when you’re able to calculate everything else.”

“Doctor, I haven’t done geometry since high school.” replied Watanabe, who was the second most proficient person in the area in terms of mathematics. “I can barely even remember these calculations for physics. *Mattaku mou...*”

“Kvetch not and work! *Ye’vay, ye’vay!*”

Rabanowicz reviewed Watanabe’s work as he scribbled some numbers on the newly dried earth. Some numbers were big, some were small, and all were incomprehensible to almost everyone on *Gemeinplatz*. After a couple long minutes, Watanabe had found a number that he read out loud, “Three hundred half-feet... How long is that?”

“That’d be around...” Rabanowicz looked around her for a suitable landmark. She pointed at a solitary tree that looked smaller than a match from where they were. “That far away. Maybe not in the final design; we’ll definitely need to make some compromises if we only have copper to work with.”

“I see. That’s still a very long range for such a heavy projectile, isn’t it?”

“It is.” Rabanowicz adjusted her spectacles, which were barely of any use due to how dirty they had become from dust. “Not like I can see that black blur in the distance properly, but I assume that’s far away enough.”

Watanabe heaved a sigh heavier than the mass he had calculated. "I miss meters and kilos..."

"There are none of these so-called 'meters' here, so you better get used to it monsieur."

Rabanowicz dusted herself off after a job well-done. Drawing on earth tended to raise a lot of dust that stuck on her gambeson. "Madame Ayomide? That is you, right?"

"Yes, I'm me, Doctor Rabanowicz." Ayomide wondered whether it was a mistake to intrude on the work of these number-crunchers.

Rabanowicz's eyes lit up once she recognized Ayomide's voice. "Great! I was about to go searching for you, but I see that the One Above has sent you here just in time." She took hold of Ayomide's hand not to lose her. "I have some experiments that I'd like to conduct with your aeromancy."

"My whatamancy?"

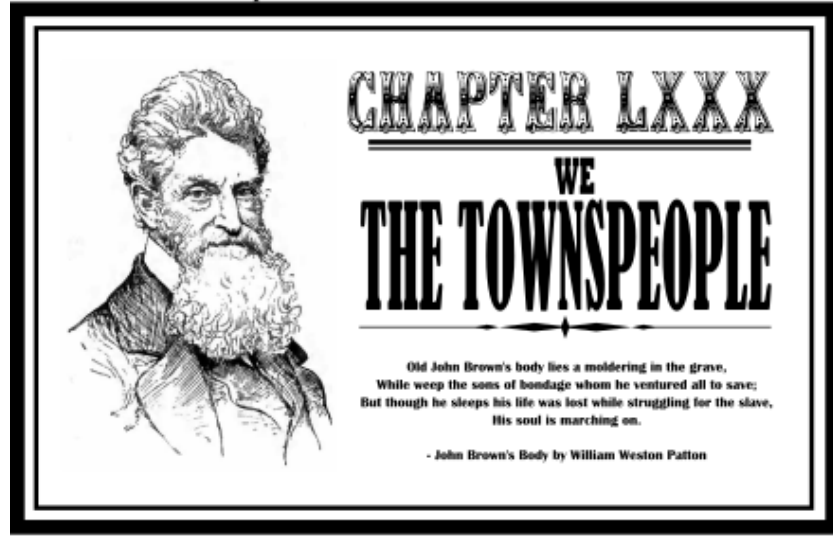
"Aeromancy, or 'wind magic' as you people prefer to refer to it in a simpler manner. Monsieur Watanabe, fetch the water clock!" Watanabe ran off to fetch their "water clock", which were two pieces of pottery where one of them slowly dripped water and collected in the other to measure the time. "I'd like to know how much energy your wind can generate per second so that we can determine whether or not it's powerful enough for the machine that we intend on building."

Ayomide didn't exactly get what Rabanowicz was saying, but she vaguely understood that it might be beneficial if she were to help. "O-Okay?"

"Great! We shall start once Monsieur Watanabe returns with the water clock."

Chapter 83: Chapter LXXX – We the townspeople.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 80



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

58th of Summer, 5859

Some field right outdoors where there's currently a lot of kilns, Libertycave



The kilns roared, the copperworkers poured, and the sky was filled with soot. Libertycave had come back to life once more. For Bilal, it had felt way too empty after the League had left for Azdavay. Now however, the slaves freed from the plantations had made their way up to the Promised Land where there'd be plenty of accommodations. Mud huts and slime soup weren't exactly the best of accommodations, but one could definitely do much worse.

Bilal was the one who had been left in charge of Libertycave, so he was responsible for finding out what to do with all these refugees. Some had made their way to Zon'guldac as usual, those people would be given food and clothing for their journey, but the percentage of the freemen who decided to stay had increased. A lot of them had volunteered to be on the frontlines, but Brown had instructed them not to strain their logistics too much by taking in everyone who wanted in.

Even a thousand people were causing the old man quite the headache in terms of supplies. First was the provision of food, which was important for the continued functioning of your average member of the Homo sapiens. That was currently solved with foraging the land and buying food from the local merchants, though this wouldn't be scalable for a bigger army. Second was the provision of equipment, mostly spears and javelins. One spear was easy to make; a thousand wasn't exactly any harder, but it did take a lot of work from a lot of people and making that many people cooperate efficiently took a whole lot more.

"Treat the molds gently, there- there you go." Bilal watched as a group of newcomers operated one of the newer kilns. Unlike the older kilns made out of clay, mud, hopes and dreams, the newer kilns were made out of bricks smeared with mud for isolation and bound together by mortar made of lime mined from Mount Curry. The bricks themselves were made en masse clamp by clamp, where clay bricks would be set in a huge pile before a pile of charcoal would be set on fire to bake them.



All this brick and copperwork required plenty of raw material however, and Bilal and his mining comrades had also been left in charge of that. Thankfully, copper wasn't complicated to mine since it could be found in the surface, and the copper mine of the late Sir Algernon was a perfect place to find some. Clay was easy to find as well, so easy in fact that the people in Libertycave stepped on

clay for most of their waking hours. Brown had told them that he must have been led to this location by Providence, and that sort of sentiment wasn't all too uncommon amongst the people of Libertycave. Carts filled with copper rolled down the mountain, pits of clay rolled up to their clamps and the workers toiled to-and-fro to build in this bountiful land.

Build they had, much more than the aforementioned brick kilns they had built in fact. Mud huts were slowly going extinct in Libertycave as brick houses with copper rooves proved the fittest. For now the rooves were an earthly orange color, but they'd slowly turn green as it got covered by patina from oxidation. Compared to mud or straw, copper wouldn't leak much water which would be very desirable once the rainy season came back.

However, Bilal wasn't focusing on roofing at this moment. Construction had slowed down as weather would be the least of their concerns if they weren't focusing on making weapons required for war. The new copperworkers broke the molds after the copper had cooled down, revealing a newborn spear tip. This tip was broad, of a model that was meant to be wielded rather than thrown. Other kilns were working on spear tips that were much narrower and long, ones that were meant for throwing. There were also other lines making bowls/helmets to secure the most important part of the body. Having a full set of armor would have been nice, but that was a consideration for a time other than "this week". They had to be so quick in fact that they only made the spear tips and left the assembly of shaft to the folks in the army to do on their march. Newly constructed boxes were being filled with tips and transported on to donkeys, and those donkeys were coming back with fresh food from the newly liberated farms and plantations from which Hakim, the cook, would make something palatable to eat.

With the molds broken and newbies trained, Bilal made his way to a local barrel full of water. He splashed the water on his face to cool down after having stood next to the kilns for so long, though the water itself was far from cool as well. He washed his face to clean the soot, and a nearby bar of soap helped his hands be pristine once more. Hygiene was #1 despite everyone's busy schedule. Libertycave felt like #1 despite it being a whole lot smaller and less grand than many of the cities in Gemeinplatz. The air might have been filled with smoke from the kilns, but the air was free for all to breathe. The buildings may be clumsily built, but the buildings were theirs to inhabit. The food may be meagre, but it was food made by free men who worked for no lord. The land was theirs, the seas were theirs, the skies were theirs...

"Mister Bilal! Mister Bilal!" A shout came from a young boy, Ejike who was a fellow former slave of Sir Algernon, running towards Bilal.

"What's happening, lad?" replied Bilal, who was still trying to cool off near the barrel.

"Nothing."

"Then why are you shouting at me?"

Ejike took out a letter from his pocket and handed it to Bilal. "To deliver you this letter."

"This's not nothing."

"I didn't say I had nothing. I was just saying that nothing was happening." Ejike said with a knowing smirk that only a little brat could have.

"You kids are way too clever for your own good. Now git!" Seeing Bilal's annoyance at his antics, Ejike disappeared off the scene and left the foreman to his own devices. He was left with a large

piece of paper accompanied by a smaller paper.

Bilal began by reading the smaller piece of paper, which was no easy task. Sure, he had newly learned how to read and write Latin script, but the problem lay in the fact that there was no standard for writing in Gemeinplatzish. Brown spelt words as if they were English words, Watanabe spelt them like Japanese, the freemen had wildly varying standards... One had to slowly and vocally read a message to understand what it was supposed to be. The letter went thusly [all sic]:

*To Mr. Bilal,
I hope that you and the others in Libertycave are faring well.*

With the Lord ever graciously watching over us, our men are prepearing to set out on schedule. The men are most gratefull for the Equipment coming their way, and I hope that you'll continue your excelent Work by helping Doctor Rabanovich with a special Project. She has made designs of a Machine that we believe has the potential to be of great Help in the upcoming battle. You may find her designs illustrated on the other paper.

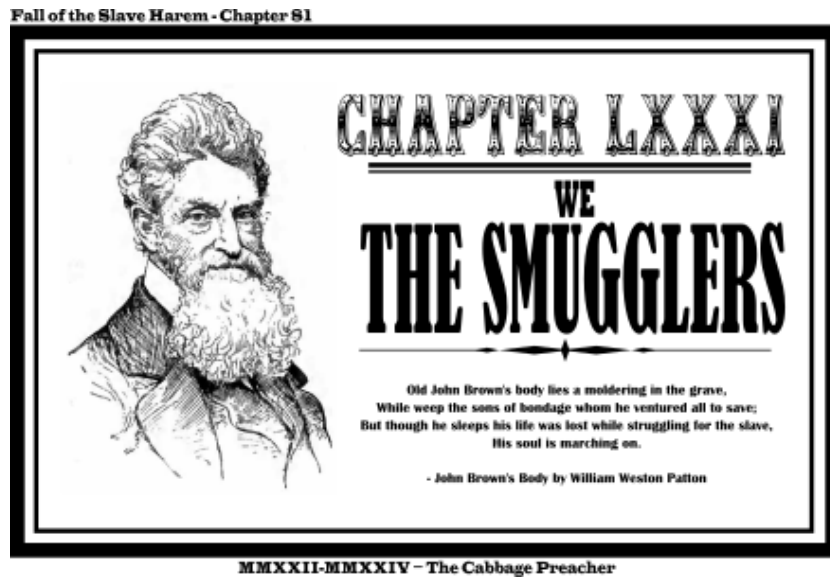
*Signed,
John Brown*

As Brown stated, the larger paper contained detailed sketches of three machines that were to be cast from copper. Two were cannon-sized while one looked to be some form of infantry weapon. These made Bilal a bit nervous. The largest pieces he had casted were roof tiles which were all basic flat sheets that were easy to cast. What Rabanowicz wanted was a whole lot more complicated than simple flat sheets. She wanted thick, sturdy tubes like that of a cannon. Bilal would have been sure that they were cannons if not for an attachment, labeled **SUPER IMPORTANT** and underlined several times, which looked like a reinforced barrel that attached to all these devices.

Bilal truly had no idea as to what they were cooking up. He gave up on thinking too hard on it. Clearly it was some sort of siege engine and promptly finishing it seemed very important for crashing down the walls of Casamonu.

As the old man said and Bilal would say to himself at the moment, "Let's not stand idle and get to work."

Chapter 84: Chapter LXXXI - We the smugglers.



60th of Summer, 5859

A dimly lit building far in the outskirts of town, Casamonu

Business was booming; booming was business for those who dealt in big booms.

Ayda, the current smuggler and former love interest of Shinasi, dealt with many things of great boon to her and her customers. For some it was textiles, for others it was untaxed wine, to others a boom in the form of gunpowder. “Black gold” as it was called, gold for those who wanted a surefire way of blowing someone else to smithereens.

Luckily for Ayda, there was no shortage of people looking for just that, especially in a time of conflict such as the one that Casamonu was going through. “We can barely keep up with all these orders...” she muttered while watching her underlings work away. They were a diverse bunch she had gathered from the backstreets of Casamonu, from those with the lightest of skin to the darkest. “Work faster you dolts!”

Making gunpowder wasn’t easy, especially when they had to work without coming under suspicion from any officials. Charcoal wasn’t hard to find, Ayda had a few members of the Charcoal Guild of Casamonu in her pocket. They’d produce extra, something usually not allowed by guilds to control prices, for her to use. Sulfur was commonly used by the members of the Herbalists’ & Potionmakers’ Guild of Casamonu, who prescribed it as a laxative and whatever else they made up at that moment. She’d get a few thousand prescriptions worth of sulfur from them (thankfully she didn’t actually have to take those prescriptions). The last ingredient that they’d need would be saltpeter, which was also the crappiest part. Thankfully the Gravediggers’ Guild was more than happy to deal with excrement instead of dead bodies once in a while, so Ayda had an entire graveyard which actually functioned as a saltpeter works. The gravediggers had many empty “graves” which they filled with excrement and, through the magical machinations of Mother Earth, that shit would be worth something as it would get covered by saltpeter. Of course, the people of Gemeinplatz knew not what happened under the ground. The whole process of efflorescence was a mystery that nobody really understood, but Ayda did understand that it got her money.

After all the ingredients were together, they'd bring it to the mill that she was in right now where the men would grind the ingredients together under a huge slab of limestone.

This mill was disguised as a standard windmill used for grinding flour, though this wasn't fully a lie as the men did occasionally use the mill for grinding their own flour. They also had rooms for brewing moonshine on the wings of the building, along with a little armory in case a curious onlooker needed to be dealt with. The best part was that there hadn't been that many curious onlookers ever since the count left. Ayda loved being able to conduct business without anyone sticking their stinky noses into her kegs filled with booze and powder. Not that anyone would willingly stick their noses into a keg filled with gunpowder, but one had to be safe.

Suddenly, a knock on the door of the mill. A knock that was barely heard by those on the inside due to how noisy the mill is. Ayda nodded at one of the armed workers to open the door. Who could be knocking at the door in this ungodly hour? The workers scrambled to hide, doing their best to throw sheets over their fine work. The door gently opened to reveal...

"A darkskin?" It was someone wearing full black, their faces covered with a hood. Ayda could only see their black hands. They were obviously a fugitive judging from the fact that their master was nowhere to be seen. "Look, you're at the wrong place. Forget about this place and run away before there's any trouble."

The intruder raised her hands and pointed at a worker who was standing next to the mill. "You, brother, are you a slave?"

Ayda was confused at the question. The worker responded before she could vocalize anything. "No, we're just Miss Ayda's employees." His coworkers confirmed the statement by nodding in agreement.

"So, she's giving jobs to the fugitives?" That wasn't too surprising for a criminal enterprise. Fugitives were desperate for money, and nobody would believe them if they ratted your business out. "How does she treat you?"

"Equally." replied the worker, with the hidden implication that she made them break their backs all equally.

"Good, that means we can work together." The intruder took out a bag of coins that jingled most pleasingly. "Miss Ayda, was it? I'm here to relay another request from Joh- *ahem*, Isaac Smith. I'm Kyauta, glad to meet you."

"I'm glad to meet you and your bag of coins." Ayda took the bag of coins, not bothering to even ask what the job was. This Smith fellow seemed to be very lucrative. Then she furrowed her brows upon realizing a big problem with what was happening. "How did you find this place?"

"That's a secret." replied Kyauta with a sly smile.

"Is it now?" Ayda paused just for the briefest of moments before finding the answer herself. "The only one who could have known is Shinasi. He spilled the beans, right? I swear, I'm going to teach that winesop a lesson the next time I lay my eyes upon his lanky arse."

“I’ll convey your message to Shinasi.” Kyauta refrained from telling the fact that Shinasi had told them about what he and Ayda had gotten up to in such a secluded place.

“You don’t need to, it’s better if it’s a surprise.” Ayda began counting the coins that she had been given. Once again, she was impressed by all the money that Smith had. What was he? “So, what does your boss want? More textiles?”

“We have enough of those. Mister Smith wants all the gunpowder that you acquire in three days’ time.”

“Alright, I’ll get to- all that gunpowder?!” Ayda usually wasn’t one to question her client’s order, but her curiosity was much too strong. “I thought that he was a simple trader looking for cheap goods to smuggle, what does he...” A few possibilities popped up in Ayda’s mind: maybe he was going to begin trading in more illicit goods, maybe he was planning on making the grandest fireworks show or, maybe, Smith was planning on blowing his competitors up.

“All you need to know is that we need the gunpowder ready in storage when the day comes. How much will you be able to provide?”

“You can buy out all the gunpowder currently in storage along with the gunpowder we’ll be able to produce in three days with this money.” Ayda calmed down and returned to her usual self. Questioning the customer wasn’t her job. “Though, you’ll need to retrieve it. I don’t have enough trustworthy men to send up here and carry the goods.”

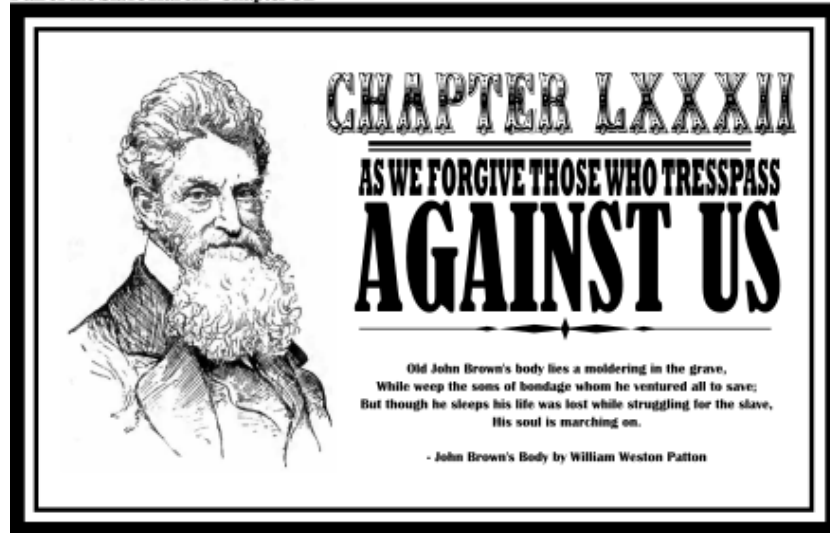
“No worries. We’ll have lots of people to carry these.” Kyauta turned around, opening the door. “Good night, and see you soon.”

The door closed behind her, leaving the room in total silence as the workers had stopped milling to watch the scene. It was awfully silent, save for the cicadas crying outside. Then Ayda suddenly cried out:

“Get back to work, you dolts! We have a big order to fulfill!”

Chapter 85: Chapter LXXXII – As we forgive those who trespass against us.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 82



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

**61st of Summer, 5859
Town Square, Azdavay**

There was nothing of much note happening in the town square. “Nothing of much note” would normally be, as the combination of words imply, be nothing of much note. There were people going to-and-fro, workshops selling their goods on the sidewalk, and a general rush to everyone’s walk as they tried to quickly get out of the summer sun’s way, nothing that Shakira hadn’t seen before in her previous years visiting Azdavay in summer.

“This place was full of doomsday preachers a few days ago...” muttered Shakira while making her way through the square. She had a ridiculously large-brimmed straw hat on her head to keep the sun out of her face, though that didn’t stop the sun from irritating her. Her only wish was to finish her work for the day and coop herself into a nice, cold room, so she joined the others in hastening her steps. Thankfully, years of adventuring had given her the necessary endurance to not collapse from fatigue there and then.

Shakira’s destination was one of the gates of the city, the same one from where the slaves had first escaped back a season ago and also the same one that the fugitives had entered back in with their army a few days ago. She remembered the panic in the city the day that the slaves had made their exodus, the bloodshed and the environment and mistrust that came after it. Every day there would be news of a plantation being burnt down, of small caravans returning with all their goods being forfeit, of an army of savages gathering to burn down Azdavay any day... Now that these “savages” had arrived however, things were way too normal. Shakira sometimes doubted whether or not she was still alive, whether she had been killed fighting in the initial arrival of the fugitives and now she lived in an otherworld.

Yes, that must be it, or so she thought with her brain simmering under the summer sun, she had died and this was another world very similar to her old one. That was a much simpler explanation compared to thinking that the entirety of Gemeinplatz might have been wrong; there was simply no

way that the entirety of Gemeinplatz had the wrong idea about the “savages”, simply no way that a civilization of millions was uncivilized enough to enslave such civilized peoples, simply no way that she had adventured to keep this uncivilized civilization’s gears turning.

With her arrival at the gate, Shakira was greeted with smiles by a group of darkskins of the League. “Morning, miss.” They were accompanied by a company of pack animals and goods which needed to make their way inside. Such labor was divided into many parts, and Shakira had been tasked with delivering spearheads to workshops inside the city. These spearheads would be finished by turners who’d construct shafts for them, and Shakira would also deliver these finished spears to the camp.

The members of the League seemed to hold respect for these laborers helping them in their efforts, hence the warm greetings she was receiving. “Morning.” Normally she wouldn’t even have to reciprocate the greetings of a bunch of darkskins, but she had found herself in another Gemeinplatz. She had even heard that one of the leaders of these darkskins was one “Lady Orange”, which the idea of a darkskin being a “lady” was one that had made Shakira laugh the first few times she had heard it. Once she had seen Lady Orange cast a spell at night however, a spell illuminating the entirety of the camp in one go, and she had decided that making mockery of this lady wasn’t a good idea for her continued wellbeing. Especially as Lady Orange had been the one to make the ambush in Mount Curry possible, and Shakira prayed that her involvement wouldn’t be found out lest she join the noblemen in being hung off a tree. “Where’re the spears?”

“Here.” pointed out the freeman towards a pretty large crate, around half the size of a person. “These were a pain to carry...” he muttered under his breath.

Shakira simply took a few steps towards the box, clasped it between her two hands, and with only a “hup” coming out her mouth, she had the box carried on her head without breaking a sweat. Carrying a large box was nothing compared to carrying an enormous, oversized sword as she usually did. The freemen were impressed, so much so that one of them clapped, and Shakira bid farewell to them with a wave of one of her hands. She made her way back to the town square, to a small street that branched off it which had a bunch of craftsmen who were all members of the Turners’ Guild.

“Good morning, gentlemen.” saluted Shakira as she left the crate full of spearheads to the turners. They were too focused on working to even take notice of their visitor, and Shakira used this opportunity to take a break under the shade of the workshop. She had visited the turners a few times before, mostly when she needed a new handle for her sword. Many more adventurers came to them for similar reasons as well, and the Turners’ Guild was pretty large and advanced for a small town like Azdavay. They had impressive belt-driven lathes powered by the sweat and tears of apprentices turning cranks while their masters (not the slaveowner kind of master) worked to carve the wildly spinning wood into something usable.



Watching the lathes turn was mesmerizing, even dangerously so if one valued their time. It was like magic, so much so that especially good woodworkers would be called lignumancers from their ability to manipulate trees. With their ability to take a run-of-the-mill block of wood and reveal something completely new from the inside of it, it truly felt like magic to an observer like Shakira. There wasn't much time for diving into thought however, so Shakira exited the workshop after taking a few of the finished spears to deliver to the camp.

On her way out, Shakira noticed a familiar figure amongst the passersby... what was her name again? The passerby saluted Shakira before she could remember her name. "Good morning, Miss Shakalaka!"

Shakira breathed a sigh of relief upon realizing that they had mutually forgotten their names. "Shakira." She cleverly avoided mentioning the other's name.

"I'm sorry!" The passerby of a name that began and ended with the letter "a" laughed to hide her embarrassment. "It's a bit longer than something like 'Azra', so I had forgotten it..."

"Right, Azra! Azra, right?"

"Yes, I am?"

A brief silence, very much awkward despite its short length, followed by the two sides unsure whether to bid farewell or try speaking again. The silence broke after half a minute. "...so, are you going to the camp?" asked Azra, seeing the spears in Shakira's hands. They had ended up walking together towards the camp.

"Yes, I'll be setting off to Casamonu tomorrow with them."

"Oh, I'll be coming along as well!" Azra turned to proudly display a fine steel sword sitting in an engraved leather scabbard. "I used the last of my money to get this."

“Huh? ‘Last of my money’? How much money did you have?”

“I had a lot after I sold some of my spare clothes a couple days ago. You see, my family owns a printing press in Casamonu...”

“A printing press?!”



Shakira looked at Azra in a new light. Not only was she rich, but she was the daughter of a printer... She herself had never seen a printing press, nor was there one in Azdavay. Paper was common enough, sure, but printing presses were highly regulated in Gemeinplatz, so much so that Shakira wasn't even sure if she had ever seen a print in her life (not that she could understand writing to distinguish it). Her family must have been close to the imperials to even have such a privilege, and that was the important part that she got from this brief exchange. Such a young girl having much more wealth than her pissed off Shakira somewhat, but she did her best to hid her mild disdain.

“That's the response that most people give when I say that.” added Azra, looking somber. She didn't look to pleased with her prestigious heritage.

“I- I see...” Shakira found a question to rail the conversation back. “How did they let you in though? I thought they weren't accepting mercenaries.”

“I went to the Hero directly and told him that I wanted to join the holy war against the Demon King!” replied Azra with much excitement in her voice. “He agreed to let me in once he learnt that I was literate, though I haven't told him about the printing press yet.”

“Are you sure you want to... you know, you seem to be off the well-bred sort. I don't think you really need to-”

“Stop right there, Miss Shakira.” Azra raised her hand to block Shakira from muttering anything else. “I’d rather die by the sword than live while the Demon King ravages this realm!” She was quoting something she had read a long time ago. “A noble adventurer like you will understand what I mean.”

Shakira wasn’t noble, nor was she much of an adventurer at the current moment, nor did she understand what Azra meant. She shrugged at her fanciful notions. “Sure...”

“You shall remember this day when the Demon King is slain and these days of yore are recorded into legend!” declared Azra with her sword pointed at the sky, which caused a few bystanders to pause and stare at the lunatic brandishing a weapon inside the city.

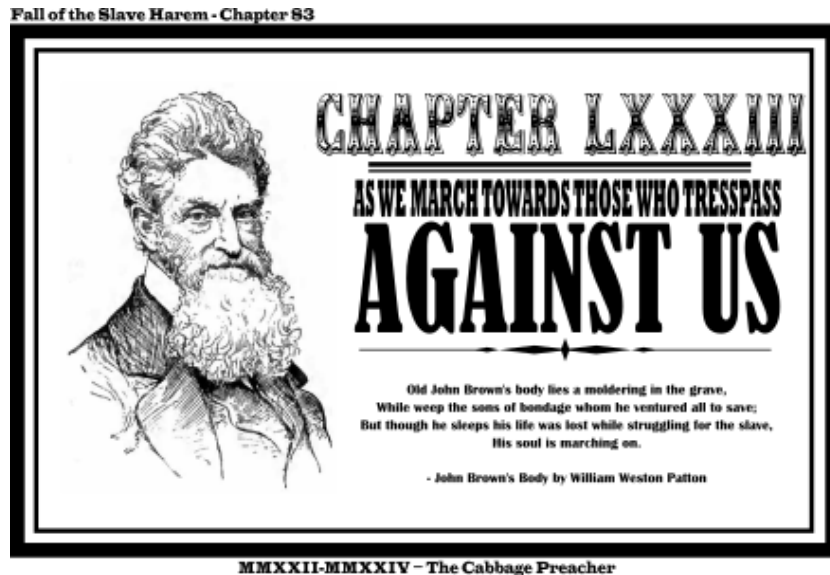
“Eh, I’m not so sure.” replied Shakira, pausing as she approached the camp. “We’re here now. I’ll be on my way to drop these off.”

“And I’ll be on my way to report to the Hero!”

Thus Shakira and Azra parted ways for the moment, both in a *Gemeinplatz* that Shakira felt was very foreign to her.

The John Brown Isekai has its first fanfiction! [Read it here](#) if you are interested in some light slice-of-life action.

Chapter 86: Chapter LXXXIII – As we march towards those who trespass against us.



62nd of Summer, 5859

Some field right outside of town that still has a lot of people camping on it, Azdavay

The day had come. One week had passed, and everything was ready... or so John Brown hoped. “Good morning, men of the League!” His voice went out to the field, where he was in the middle of a thousand brave men (and women, but Brown was using “men” to refer to all of humankind).

This group wasn’t in the usual semi-donut that they found themselves in. No, donut formations were unsuitable for military applications as it turns out. They were in somewhat orderly squares, the kind that’d not allow cavalry to penetrate it. Let the noblemen have their fancy armor and burly horses, for the freemen could stand in a square long enough that their horses would drop from the exhaustion. That was what they hoped for anyways, and there wasn’t much but hopes and dreams to go off of in the League when all they had was copper spears as weapons and bowls as helmets. Still, it was much more hopeful compared to the times when all they had were a dozen men and some spear-throwers. They’d have more than a million men by the next season if they kept at it in this pace, though Rabanowicz would mutter something about this odd thing called “statistics” if anyone said anything like that.

Never mind the aforementioned however, for Brown saw that his men were eager for action. Atop his horse he was flanked by the captains, Tubman, Ayomide, Shinasi, and Watanabe and he reached his hand out to the sky as he spoke. “Men! I implore you to gaze upon the beauty of Creation. The sky, the trees, and of course, each other! Take note of how the rising sun shines equally on each of us. The Lord doesn’t make the sun shine any brighter for the lords sitting in their thrones, no, neither does he make it shine any brighter depending on the brightness of skin! We are all equally the children of our Heavenly Father, all equally important and precious in His realm, and it’d be a crime of upmost barbarity to deny anyone the right to stand equally amongst their sisters and brothers. Now!” He drew the sword, the one he had taken from Watanabe Generico and carried all the way down the mountain, and pointed it in the general direction of Casamonu. “Are you willing to march on and make history? Those who are not are free to stay where they are and make

themselves comfortable. Those who are ready follow me and get to action, *en marché!*” His speech ended with jubilee from the crowd, who were eager to get going and do something other than stand around and train.

The captains around Brown dissolved as they made way for their own companies, and a minor round of cacophony occurred as everyone prepared to march. The squares wobbled a bit, some elbows were accidentally dug into other people, and it took a good minute or two for the formation to reassemble from a square into a column for marching. Each company had designated themselves a banner to identify themselves: John Brown had a replica Star-Spangled Banner with 33 stars, Ayomide had simply picked a plain orange banner, Shinasi had a yellow clover on a white banner while Watanabe had simply written “ランダム旗” on a rag and called it a day. It’s not like the others could read his lousy attempt at a banner anyways. Tubman had gone for a blue-white design with a white broken chain in a blue background.

Brown turned his head around to take a look. A semi-orderly march in column, standardized equipment for the men, even banners for different companies... He couldn’t help but mutter “Praise the Lord!” when he saw such a scene. The people who had come to watch the army leave seemed to be impressed as well. There was a procession of newly freed slaves bidding farewell with flowers, fresh food and flowing tears, with many blessings and prayers being exchanged. Vaiz himself had enlisted a team of chaplains to give an optimal number of blessings, referred to him as “buffs”, to the departing men. On the other side was a smaller group, that consisting of the native denizens of Azdavay. They were a whole lot more reserved, with some of them betting on whether or not the “army of savages” would come back alive. This was not a metaphorical sort of betting either – one opportunistic gambler had set up a table to bet actual money on the prospects of the League. A majority of the money was on the League dissolving before they even made it to Casamonu; a very small minority of gamblers would win quite the fortune if the League managed to topple the Empire (and Shinasi was among these potential big-winners as he had sneaked to the table to bet in favor of himself). At the tail end of this mass of people were pack animals and the people carrying supplies, who were flanked by a few adventurers escorting them. They had received good money for their labor, more than some of them had ever seen in their entire life, and therefore were carrying enormous loads of goods with smiles on their faces.

Slowly the walls of Azdavay disappeared, and so did the crowds around the army who had things to do other than gawk at departing armies. There was a sudden quiet, only the whistle of wind and the hush of leaves accompanying the march of a thousand boots. Occasionally there was a sneeze or a snippet of chatter breaking the silence, other than that the march was surprisingly quiet: nobody really wanted to have a chat while they had hours of marching ahead. It was as if the men of the League were an arrow shot from a bow: released with lots of force packed, silent in flight, and (hopefully) deadly on impact. Quick, quiet, efficient, as Brown liked it. “An arrow shot to the heart of slavery!” he suddenly shouted upon thinking of the metaphor, prompting the people around him to stare in confusion. They quickly turned back to look forward on the road, having been long used to the eccentricities of their commander-in-chief.

Meanwhile, unnoticed by a Brown deep in thought, Ayomide had rode forward to meet him. Unlike the old man, she was wobbling around on her horse. Her shaking hands showed how comfortable she was with the prospect of riding atop an animal. “Captain, excuse me if I interrupt your clearly very deep thought session, but...” she looked around her “...okay, excuse me for the stupid question, but are we really doing it? Like, for real?”

“Oh, young lady, always with the questions...” Brown had gotten this question many times, and he had answered it many times. Why were they not staying up the mountains, staying safe? Why were

they causing a ruckus instead of letting the Empire forget about their existence? “Tell me, why haven’t you left and made your way to Zon’guldac? You’ve had plenty of time, and there’s nobody stopping you.”

Ayomide was a bit surprised by the sudden questioning from old Brown. “Umm...”

Brown smiled, with his eyes half-closed. “Don’t hesitate to tell the truth now. Lying is much worse than telling an uncomfortable truth, young lady.”

“...well, I don’t know either.” Truth be told, Ayomide had thought of it many times before. She had often dreamed of holding Shinasi by the hand and escaping to Zon’guldac to lead their lives there without fighting further.

“Then let me tell you young lady, from the perspective of an old man who has lived three times your entire life.” Brown looked forward, as if he wasn’t speaking to anyone in particular. “I’m John Brown, from Torrington, Connecticut. Owen Brown, he was a good father and a faithful Christian, may God bless him. My mother Ruth passed away in my youth, I pray that she has reunited with the rest of the family in Heaven. Our family had a tannery, and the Lord had granted us with more than sufficient wealth for a family living in the frontier. Back when I was eleven or twelve, somewhere around that years old, I was herding cattle for a local man, he had an African boy as his slave. Of course, I was little back then, knowing little of the world. I knew little of the reason why the man beat the boy halfway to death with a shovel back then. So, why care?”

Brown turned around back to Ayomide. ““Therefore, all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you: do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets”” he paused here to take a breath ““because he who loves his neighbor must consequently love Love itself above all things; but God is Love; therefore, he loves God above all things.”

Ayomide wasn’t sure where Brown’s usual evangelism was going. “Yeah, I already know the ‘why’ for you... I thought *you* were going to tell the why for *me*.”

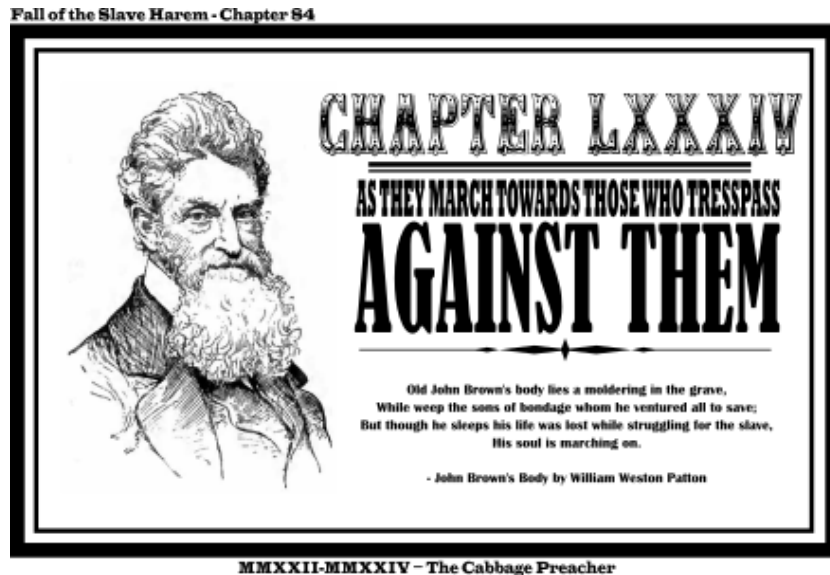
Brown couldn’t help but laugh at the question. “I’m not you, young lady, neither am I capable of commanding or reading your thoughts. I don’t get to decide why you’re here, only our Heavenly Father does.”

Ayomide could only let out an annoyed grumble in response to the all-knowing smirk that only a wise old man could produce. Worst of all, Brown had prompted her to think, and the old man tended to make one think a bit too deeply along with him. The abolitionist catgirl wizard closed her eyes, and shook her head to shoo away the thoughts.

As the old man had said, if she was still here, then she clearly had some purpose even if she hadn’t found it. They all had some reason so...

“Got it, old man. I’ll be marching on.”

Chapter 87: Chapter LXXXIV – As they march towards those who trespass against them.



62nd of Summer, 5859 Yellowclover Village, Outskirts of the City of Casamonu

Yellowclover was once a peaceful village. One so minor, so unimportant, that its name would have been scrubbed off records not out of a grand conspiracy but out of the fact that nobody cared about it enough.

On such a peaceful day, Shinasi Sr. was sitting as he oft did. He was outside, on a stool, overlooking their small garden. Sure, they didn't officially own any land due to being lowly peasants, but no pesky lords would bat an eye to them planting a few crops in the empty space around their house. Most popular was tobacco, a cash crop that got them enough money to repair an old shoe now and then, and there was also a few cucumbers for pickling.

"Don't pick them so harshly, you're going to ruin the plants." In absence of any workable legs for work, Shinasi did his best by instructing his one and only daughter on the field. Child labor was considered as just ordinary labor for the inhabitants of Gemeinplatz. Thankfully, Shirin had it much better compared to the children and slaves in the mines. Working the fields carried a whole lot less risk of lung cancer, and the warm sunlight was much friendlier compared to a dank shaft. "Be gentler with them."

"Yes, yes." Shirin wasn't really listening to any advice like any child of her age would do. "You want to eat some?" She extended a cucumber to her father as an offering of peace.

"Thank you." Shinasi received his cucumber and bit into it. It didn't taste superb, especially as it lacked the ever-expensive salt. Salt was for pickling, not snacking. It was like a bomb made of cool water going off in his mouth and that's all that he needed at that moment. "This year's batch looks pretty good. These'll make some good pickles."

“I’ll get them in before they dry.” Shirin collected the cucumbers into a straw basket and let her father be alone. All Shinasi could do was listen to the cicadas, watch the leaves, and think deeply about the immortality of the crab. He actually had never seen a crab, and he did often ponder about them. How big was a crab? How did adventurers deal with such a beast? Was it really immortal as he had heard it was?

Such notions of pondering giant immortal crabs was thrown aside when he heard a group of screams quickly approach his premises. “Run! Run for your lives!”

“Savages!”

“Brutes!”

“Doom!”

Now, such commotion was pretty uncommon for Shinasi Sr. to see. In fact, it was uncommon for any action to happen in Yellowclover. Whatever it was though, these people seemed to be genuinely running away from something fierce. Shinasi called out to some of the runners, but they were too running for their lives to take the briefest of pause. Then he called for Shirin as well, but she didn’t pop out the house like he hoped.

There wasn’t much that Shinasi could do but wait for the inevitable.

He watched as the runners from before came back with whatever “weaponry” they could scrounge up. This hastily assembled mob assembled themselves into a blob which didn’t look too promising as a fighting force. There was no coordination, none of anything, just the collective survival instincts of the human mass.

Shinasi wasn’t in a mood to review the military capabilities of the mob in front of him however. Instead, his shout was mixing into the shouts of the mob, “Shirin! Where are you?!” mixing into similar cries searching for loved ones. No matter how much he cried out, Shirin seemed to not come out that house. “Shirin, are you fine? Shirin!” Shinasi lunged down from the chair and he began crawling on the ground with his arms. At least he could still do that, and he’d find his daughter even if it meant crawling to the end of the world. “I’m coming over, hold on!”

No matter his dedication though, the body of an old man entering his sixties wasn’t made for crawling. It seemed that time had slowed down. Every little movement felt like an eternity. His ear was forced to the ground, he heard the clops of horses approaching. The mob immediately dissolved into screaming individuals the moment they saw the approaching cavalry. There was a man shouting: “Peasants, dissolve!” Then the cavalry seemingly came to a halt, as there was an absence of noise that Shinasi could hear.

“In the name of I, Sir Corvus II, Baron of Yellowclover, we have come to collect the taxes that rightfully belong to him. You are sixty days behind in your tax payments. We’ll be clearing your debts with interest.” A clap echoed throughout the village. “Men, proceed with payment.”

The horses clopped once more, and there were sounds of doors being broken and people screaming. Shinasi was doing the best he can to drag himself into his house, but his arms were slow and he was getting even more tired by the second. “Shirin! Hide yourself! Run! Oh please, just, run...” Even his voice was giving out. His vision was clouded by tears.

No matter how much he dragged his arms, he seemed to stay in place. Was he imagining it? Had time become so slow for him that it seemed like an eternity? It felt that way. Shinasi wasn't moving. He decided that he'd use the last of his breath on prayer, to maybe appease the Divine for one last time in hopes of reaching a good otherworld in the end. Still, despite having given up hope, he was still crawling forward in some hope. Hope that he'd at least see his child one more time before eternally departing this realm. Every time he closed his eyes he saw Shirin, then she disappeared when he opened them, then Shinasi Jr. when he closed them again, yet he was gone when they were open once more. Time was slow. He wasn't moving an inch. Shinasi wasn't moving. He turned his head to look back.

There was a soldier smiling with amusement at the man crawling under his feet.

"Oh..."

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

62nd of Summer, 5859
Casamonu, City of Casamonu

Things were quite the mess, especially for Sir Korvus II.

First his father, Sir Korvus Jr. had been killed in battle. His grandfather, Sir Korvus Sr., was a bit too old to manage anything, and so Sir Korvus II had the honor of having to manage the family's estate around Casamonu. "And, by the time I had returned to the city, there wasn't anyone left to stop me from taking over. They had been too busy killing each other."

"Then it is as Master Long has predicted." In front of Sir Korvus, who now occupied the office of the count, was a man in long flowing white robes. He was obviously a cultivator of some sort, and he was taking notes while Korvus talked.

"What did he predict?"

"That there shall be a great time of strife before the arrival of the Demon King." He gently gestured towards the window, indirectly pointing to the city itself. The only thing visible from such a high floor was the smoke from the quarters of the city which were still burning. "He shall arrive when the Empire is eating itself whole, and Master predicts that his attack will be soon."

"Yes, yes. I can consult one of the doomsday preachers outside my door if I want to hear the same thing." Sir Korvus sighed with great boredom. "Look, I'll be honest with you. I'm just here to plunder Casamonu dry before I make my way to the capital; I'm too young to spend my time with these uncivilized ignoramuses in the borderlands."

The disciple stated matter-of-factly "You'll die if you go there now."

"Is that a threat?" Korvus reached for an ornamental knife on his belt.

"No. I, and any of my comrades, could have your head right now. You'd have been long dead if Master wanted you gone."

"Then how can you be so sure of my death?" Despite his disbelieving tone on the outside, Korvus had internally become uneasy. He shifted around in his seat.

“There will be tension in the capital. Master says that the seeds have already been sown. You don’t want to be there when it blooms.”

“What tension?” Korvus leaned forward. He was intrigued.

“That only a few know, and I’m nothing but a lowly disciple.”

“You use such flowery language for a lowly disciple.” The few cultivators that Korvus encountered had all loved to speak in odd metaphors, which only annoyed him.

“One of the first lessons we receive is in speech.” The disciple coughed loudly “Anyways, that is not the point. Master just wants you to help in vanquishing the Demon King in his first attack. Just stay here a few days, avoid the capital, and Master will reward you for the effort. I hear that he has a few fine jade beauties he’d like to get off his hands... along with other material rewards.”

“That sounds...”

“All good?”

“All...”

“Good.”

“...good.” Korvus found no harm in at least humoring this Master.

“Good.” replied the disciple. “Master himself will be here shortly. Listen to him, and everyone will win.”

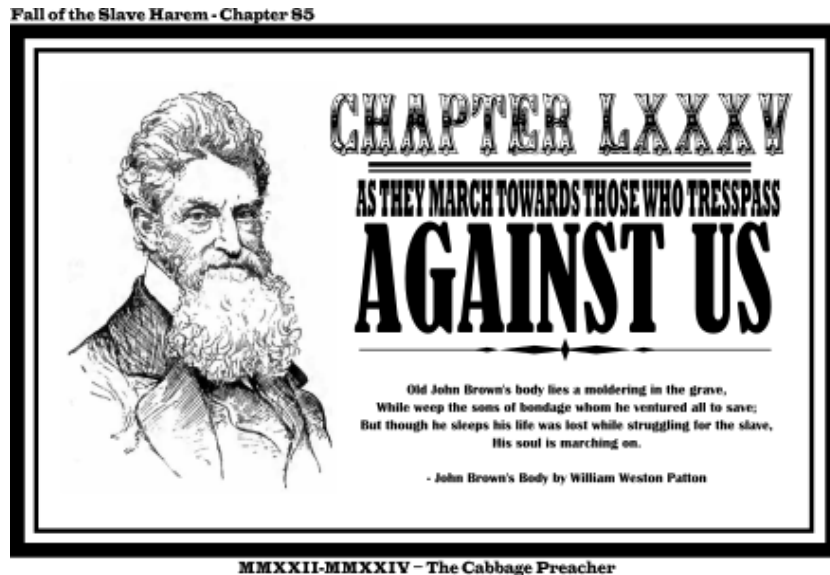
Korvus blinked. The disciple was gone. “Huh?”

Korvus blinked again. Now there was another man who had a beard long and magnificent enough to qualify as a master.

Korvus blinked to make sure he wasn’t seeing things. Yet the man refused to go away.

Just who had he agreed to?

Chapter 88: Chapter LXXXV – As they march towards those who trespass against us.



62nd of Summer, 5859
Imperial Highway №04-765, Outskirts of the City of Casamonu

As the sun had reached its peak and begun its journey back to the mountains, the hottest hours of the day had begun in Northern Gemeinplatz. Even the cicadas had stopped making noise from how tired they were. The men of the League weren't doing any better than the cicadas. There was nothing to be heard outside the occasional rustle of grass.

The entirety of the army would have dissolved by now if not for the promise of liberty at the end, and even that barely kept the soldiers together; the weakest or the most cowardly few had already deserted and made their way to Zon'guldac instead. Such attrition wasn't too surprising for a sufficiently large army. It was even low compared to the average band of levies and mercenaries that one might find in Gemeinplatz. Every day spent out of slavery had made those who were left on the road yearn for more; such seemingly unbearable heat seemed to become bearable when thinking of baring another round of whipping from a master. Either they'd fight and be free, or they'd fight and be whipped, or give up and be whipped. They'd march on, bid farewell to those who gave up and went back, and then march on some more.

"At least marching in summer means we won't have to gather firewood." muttered Shinasi, wiping his brow for the fourth time in the same minute. "Summer's quite nice, isn't it?" He turned to Ayomide riding next to him.

"I'd prefer endless rain to this nonsense. I've already got endless rain coming down on my face already." Shinasi was polite enough to take a napkin and wipe "Lady Orange's" brow for her. "I'd rather have it be winter so that I can snuggle under a nice blanket."

"Do I get to join under the blanket?"

"You won't if you- *pay attention* to the road!"

Right at that moment Shinasi's horse came to a sudden stop due to a stray tree which was so rude as to fall on the highway. "How annoying!" exclaimed Shinasi as he and the entire line of men behind him had to reposition around the tree. From a bird's eye view, they'd look like ants maneuvering around a fallen branch.

Shinasi looked back at the fallen tree while continuing on. "Urgh. I just want to get some rest." He yawned, opening his mouth so wide that a mosquito could enter. "Yellowclover should be getting close."

"Hopefully the village folk accept us staying there."

"Us village folk are simple. We'll accept anything as long as you give us food, drink or money." Shinasi raised three of his fingers. "Preferably all three... Forget that, I'm really dying for a whole lot of the second. And the first. Less of the third. Umm... what was I talking about?" Shinasi erred and paused. There was something strange in the air, things had gotten a bit too hot all of a sudden.

"Sniff... cough!" I smell something burning. Burnt wood? Is there a forest fire?" Ayomide looked around her. There was a thick trail of smoke in the distance.

Suddenly John Brown shouted, riding towards Ayomide and Shinasi who were frontmost of the army. "Look! At the ground." He frantically pointed at the ground in front of them.

"What? It's a bunch of brick." replied Ayomide.

"Young lady, look at the earth around the brick road!" Brown pointed less frantically this time, drawing attention to the earth around the edges of the road. There seemed to be foot-sized dents and puddles. "These are new trails, made by people and horses, a whole group of them. This is a group a whole lot bigger than the merchants we've encountered."

"This means?" Ayomide raised her brow.

"This means that we should stop chatting and prepare to make battle, young lady!" shouted Brown as he left for his own company. Ayomide and Shinasi looked at each other in confusion for a second before their brains processed what Brown wanted. They then proceeded to join him in shouting and gathering their own companies. There was general chaos as companies separated from columns and formed distinct squares of men. In the end four squares were formed with around 250 men each, with the squares themselves standing in a line to completely block the road.

With the squares completed, the captains convened in the middle. Tubman was quick to return with a report. "Me and Kyauta went to take a look towards the source of the smoke. There's a village there with a small group of knights causing a ruckus. One company should be enough to deal with them."

"A village?!" Shinasi moved his horse forward without thinking about it. "It's Yellowclover! Excuse me Captain, I'm not a man if I don't charge in there myself!"

"And I'm not a woman if I don't come alongside!" shouted Ayomide, drawing her gem out for combat.

"It's best if you don't charge forward and..." Brown gave up upon realizing how spirited they both were. "You're quite the honorable winesop, young man. Godspeed! Me and Tubman will lead the men forward."

The old man could only watch as Shinasi and Ayomide became naught but a blur in the distance...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Shinasi had almost no experience in horse-riding, yet he was racing the wind. Right next to him was Ayomide who, despite struggling with the pony she was on, was somehow keeping up. He was surprised by how quiet he was despite the circumstances. Shinasi always thought that'd he'd be screaming his lungs out, but there he was. In his heart there was nothing but worried solitude, thinking of what could be going wrong. What if he was on time? What if he wasn't? Thinking wasn't going to solve anything, neither was it his strong suit, so Shinasi charged forward without thinking any more.

Forward, forward, only forward until he saw a roof. Then another. It was Yellowclover. There was his neighbor's house, on fire. He didn't want to look any more lest he saw their corpses. There were screams. There was blood. There were corpses. There was Dikla the Tall, once childhood friend, forgotten in adulthood until their chance encounter in Casamonu, now dead with a sword in his hand. Next to him was his wife, slumped over him and unmoving, and their only son who had met a similar fate to his parents.

Shinasi had no time to dwell further. He'd have to assist in burying the dead later. He had to worry with the people he hoped to not bury. The young man jumped off the tired horse and began using his own legs to run, spear and shield in hand. He was faster than the horse, he had to be. There was his house. There was where his entire life had been built, where all his memories were. Little Shinasi training with a wooden sword, little Shinasi facing his first love, little Shinasi facing his first rejection... Shinasi found himself screaming ferociously as he rounded the corner into the garden. "Father! Shirin!"

There was his father, slumped on the ground. His head was bleeding. He wasn't moving. Then there was...

"Brother!"

"Shirin!"

...his sister...

"That's your name, huh?!"

...and a heavily-armored knight grappling her. He was covered head-to-toe in steel, utterly impenetrable by Shinasi's spear. "Get off, don't make I, Sir Jonathan Brown, angry."

Despite the man's warning, Shinasi ran towards him with his spear. Jonathan quickly let go of Shinasi's sister and grabbed his own spear from the ground just in time to parry the strike. She swiftly ran to Shinasi and Ayomide's side. "See, you let the *loli* escape."

"She's a child, you fucking nonce!" screamed Shinasi, charging again without hesitation.

"And you're darkfucker from the looks of it." Jonathan tried to block with his spear again, though this time Shinasi went through and chipped his shoulder plate which did nothing but remove some polish off it. "I won't be having mutts unlike you degenerates. Or, well, you won't be having mutts when I'm done with you. We'll be equal, huh?" The knight laughed at his own idea of a joke.

Shinasi was tired. He had marched all day, and he had run all the way here. He was panting, his face was flushed, and he was facing an armored opponent.

“Stay back, Shinasi.” Ayomide stepped forward and beckoned Jonathan with her hands. “Here’s a catgirl. Don’t you Awmereighkans love catgirls? Come get me!”

“How admirable, protecting your master. I’d love to add another one of you to my harem!” Jonathan put his spear down, pointing the blunt end towards Ayomide. “Nekocchi will be a bit jealous, but she’ll get over it in a day or two.” He swung his spear around to knock Ayomide down, only to be met with a green gem to his face which went “[Flash Bang]!”.

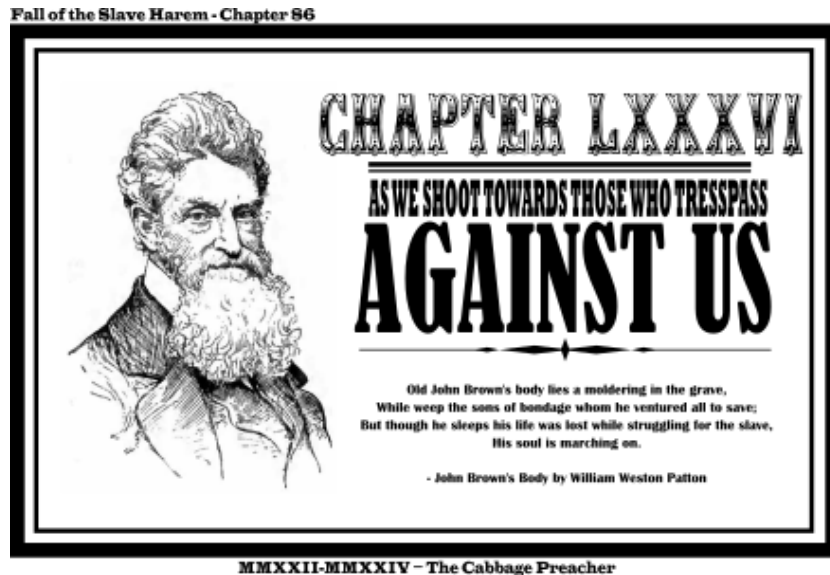
Jonathan fell down, Shinasi prepared his spear to pierce through his visor to finish him, only for Jonathan to recover and jump onto the roof of Shinasi’s house with one jump. “Oh, easy there. I’m here for some looting, not for dealing with some annoying pests.” He put his spear down, mockingly smiling at the people down below who couldn’t strike him on the roof. “I’m guessing that you are men of the Demon Lord? Peh, we’ll be having an easy time if his vanguard is this lousy.” He waved to his opponents down below. “You gave me some interesting news to deliver. I’ll be coming back for your sister later. Her Aryan features are too precious to miss. See you soon!”

Jonathan Brown jumped from roof-to-roof, disappearing from Shinasi’s vision in a flash. Despite him being gone however,

“Father!”

Their troubles were only beginning.

Chapter 89: Chapter LXXXVI – As we shoot towards those who trespass against us.



62nd of Summer, 5859
Yellowclover, Casamonu

Brown was, despite looking calm as a shallow puddle of water, slightly nervous. In his life he had only led very small fireteams into battle, with groups so small that everybody knew each other by name. He was usually in known territory surveyed by himself beforehand, in a country that he had lived in for his entire life.

Now Brown was in an alien land, leading alien men and treading alien ground not to mention the alien rifle he kept on his back for emergency situations. Now there were half a thousand people moving with him, with another half a thousand waiting in reserve. For the soldiers in the army, it was a different sort of alien feeling. Most of them would be engaging in combat for the first time, and only through tall tales told by the veterans of the battle for the copper mine did they even have the slightest of ideas.

The First Company and the Second Company were marching right next to each other, both of them in separate squares. Marching while keeping a square was slower when compared to a column, and the companies often had to carefully navigate around trees in the area compared to the comparatively flat Mount Curry they had trained in. This slowdown felt frustrating, especially when there was an entire village burning down in front of their eyes. Without falling in formation however, they'd just get ran down and the village would continue burning.

Men of the League marched forward towards the village until they met their first enemy: a pair of cavalymen carrying sacks of grain over their shoulders. "Fire!" They attempted an escape upon setting their eyes on the mass of spearmen while a horde of javelins followed behind them. The cavalymen lost their horses, but their body armor was too thick to be pierced by the javelins, so they fell on to the ground with no horses to call themselves cavalymen with. These newly inaugurated infantrymen showed themselves to be a shining example of Gemeinplatzer chivalry as they turned tail and retreated.

“We’re dealing with a well-armed enemy.” commented Tubman on her horse. She had never actually gotten the chance to lay her eyes on a full suit of armor before. “Our arms can’t even pierce them.”

“Not many things can pierce steel. We have people in this realm capable of producing gunpowder, but I have yet to meet anyone who can make firearms.” Brown thought of whether to take out his rifle and shoot them, but he also didn’t want to waste his limited ammunition. There’d come a time when he’d need to use it; that time wasn’t “two men retreating”.

The companies came to a stop in front of the village. Navigating inside within a square formation would be impossible. Brown could see a mass of cavalymen gathering far in the distance on an open area in the village square. It was a small mass not numbering more than fifty or so people.

“What do we do, Mister Brown?” asked Tubman while watching their enemy converse. “We shouldn’t let them get away; He wouldn’t want these criminals escaping.”

“The least risky approach would be to let them escape.” Brown’s eyes were on the lifeless bodies of the villagers laid on the street. “But the Lord will surely grant us victory if we dare fight for what’s right.” He rode his horse towards the men of the First Company. “General Tubman, I trust in you to maneuver Second Company to surround the village as best as they can. It’s a pretty small area, so there should be enough men. I, in the meanwhile, will have a friendly chat with the enemy commander.” He waved goodbye and exchanged quick prayers with Tubman as she left to lead the men.

Then Brown turned to his own. “Men! Listen to me carefully…”

★ FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM ★

The cavalymen who had retreated into the square had assembled themselves into a donut formation, the natural formation for debate.

“This whole realm has gone mad!” blurted their captain while watching the big black blur in the distance move.

“It is, sir. With the darkskins, the nobles fighting each other… It feels like the end days are nigh.” replied a cavalryman.

“What will we do, sir?” asked another.

“They have superior numbers, but they’re also a bunch of savages wielding sharpened sticks. We should draw them into an open field so that we can mow them down. They should run out of javelins pretty quickly while we kite them from a distance. Sir Korvus would be displeased if we let a band of fugitives go free.”

“Sir, they’re fugitives, they’ve already gone free.”

“We’ll put them back where they belong then!” The captain drew his support while the cavalymen readied their lances. However, they were stopped in their tracks by a very particular guy:

“Halt! In the name of the Lord, give me a chance to speak.” It was an old man with a magnificent white beard that made him look like a warlock. The cavalymen’s horses instinctively took a few steps back upon seeing a potentially magical person.

“Who are you? A lightskin, here? Are you some sort of magic user? A cultivator?” shouted the captain while he also took a few steps back.

The mysterious old man paused. He seemed to be taking in their words, formulating something. He eventually found a reply after a deep session of pondering. “Yes, I am. I’ll have mercy and let you know that I’m an otherworlder. The army you see before you is under my mind control magic.”

“I see.” The captain found no other real explanation as to why there would be an old lightskin amongst such a large gathering of fugitives. “That is... quite impressive, Sir Otherworlder. Are you our enemy, or a friend?”

“I’m on the side of a higher power, higher than any other power on this terrestrial realm.”

The cavalymen looked at each other in disbelief. This old man, who looked ordinary, seemed to have such impressive powers as to be able to control an entire army of men. Such a powerful warlock having the blessings of a higher power only made sense.

“I see.” replied the captain again. “So, this higher power, is it an enemy or a friend?” He was now beginning to get nervous. Who knows what such a powerful otherworlder warlock could do?

“The Lord is a friend of the righteous and an enemy of the wicked. You tell me, between the two, what do you believe yourself to be?”

“Uhm... I go to the temple every week, give a generous tithe, and I am a faithful vassal to my righteous liege. May the Divine bless our souls, I try to live a pious and good life according to scripture.” The captain felt a bit stumped by the question. What sort of nonsense was this warlock about to spout? All eyes were fixed on Brown; all eyes had been fixed on Brown for the past few minutes.

“I see, you seem to think that the Lord is your friend. Let me tell you good sir, do you think that this Divine of yours was your friend when you slew these villagers, burnt their houses, and stole their belongings? Tell me again good sir, while looking directly into my eyes, whether you are amongst the righteous or the wicked.”

“Oh, stop yapping you lowly...” The captain looked around on his high horse. There was a line of spears, only one man deep, encircling the village. He laughed out loud “Really? Men, ride out and quickly ride through these savages!” He wasn’t concerned at all when faced with such a thin line of men with such shabby weaponry. Their horses were armored too compared to the unlucky cavalymen who had made first contact, so the javelins of the fugitives couldn’t do anything either.

“Woah, careful there gentlemen!” exclaimed Brown, avoiding the men who charged headfirst towards him. “Look behind you, you’ve got greater concerns than just some old man!”

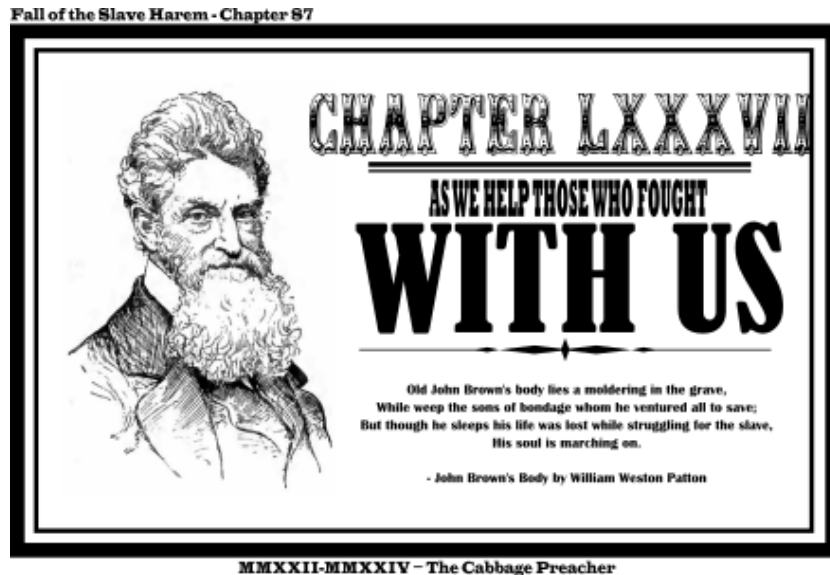
“Huh?” The cavalymen instinctively took a look behind them. There was a whole company’s worth of men who had sneaked from behind while they were too busy intently listening to Brown make up some nonsense. The situation had been so absurd as to completely make the cavalymen to forget to look at their backs once in a while.

It was too late for the cavalymen to break out now. They were encircled by a force ten times larger than them in unfavorable terrain. From the back, spears began thrusting at the exposed legs of their horses who refused to maneuver while there were so many sharp objects around them. The terrified

screams of the fallen cavalrymen were mixed in with the confused neighs of their horses to create an orchestra of abject terror and utter chaos.

As the cavalrymen fell, Brown addressed them from above “Remember gentlemen, the Lord is no friend of the wicked!”

Chapter 90: Chapter LXXXVII – As we help those who fought with us.



62nd of Summer, 5859
Yellowclover, Casamonu

“Father!”

While his comrades-in-arms were doing battle, Shinasi was concerned with one thing and one thing only. “He’s still breathing!” He and his sister were gathered around the bloodied man who could only follow his children with his eyes. Speaking had become impossible for him.

Ayomide was a few steps away from them. Her eyes still held on to the crystal from the dungeon, a tight grip even if her hand was shaking. *I could heal his wounds, but...* She remembered time when she had passed out from healing such a simple thing as Brown’s infection. Perhaps with the help of her newly-acquired magical tool she could bring him back to a survivable state, but then what? All the work that Rabanowicz had gone to procure special weaponry for the siege would be gone if there was no Ayomide to operate them. She had been conserving her magic power for that day, and the siege would definitely drag on longer than it needed if she passed out for so long...

“Father! Are you here? Father!”

And yet.

So, why care?

Shinasi and Shirin were holding on to the shirt of the old man, both crying and wetting his vest with tears. Their wails mixed together to create a horrendous sound.

Why haven't you left and made your way to Zon'guldac?

Was she to sacrifice an old man for the good of the League? It was one old man, a lightskin too, one that she didn’t know so much about. Yet, it was one old man who was very precious to Shinasi.

Could one watch as a member of one's family, even if they were not immediate family, died right in front of them?

...love Love itself above all things.

Ayomide couldn't bear to watch any further. *Damn the consequences!* She lunged forward toward the old man and screamed the first few words that came to her mind: "[I Don't Want To See Shinasi Cry]!"

Despite the odd name of her spell, it managed to take effect and a heavenly light blinded everyone around her.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

62nd of Summer, 5859
Yellowclover, Casamonu (League of Gileadites)

There was an air of jubilee mixed with anxiety around the men of the League. Jubilee from all having successfully defeated an enemy; anxiety from those who had seen war for the first time. All that time training up squares had meant nothing when they had needed to break formation while entering the village, and it dawned on them that the actual siege of Casamonu would mean the same when they entered the city itself. A few dozen men had defected in the direction of Zon'guldac after facing battle for the first time and realizing that they weren't up for it. With that, adding those who had died or got sick on the way, the population of soldiers had dropped to somewhere around nine hundred; keeping accurate count of the actual number of soldiers was a bit hard during travel.

However, for now, nobody was concerned about exact numbers. "Men of Yellowclover! The League of Gileadites, your liberators, have arrived. You have no reason to fear us! The men harassing you have been vanquished." Brown was screaming his lungs out, trying to get the surviving villagers to come back out. "You are free to tend to your wounded and bury your dead."

The few villagers who had managed to hide somewhere in time were slowly coming out of hiding while watching the armed men of the League with wary eyes. Their opinion of armed men hadn't been increased by their village having been almost destroyed minutes ago by a group of armed men, and the average skin color of this new group of armed men were a bit too different to them. Still, in the absence of anyone trying to kill them in the immediate moment, the villagers prioritized saving what they had left rather than worry about or express gratitude to these strangers who had so suddenly saved them.

"Mister Brown, me and Kyauta will be scouting the premises in case anyone has any ideas about attacking the village." said Tubman as she left Brown's side. Brown himself got off his horse and began directing the soldiers in putting out fires and generally helping the villagers in recovery. There was much to be done: getting dead bodies off the open air and into the village's temple for blessings by Vaiz and burial tomorrow, returning looted items back to its owners, healing the wounded...

Work slowed down when the sun began leaving Gemeinplatz for greener pastures elsewhere on not-Earth. Normally Ayomide would be the one to provide them with light for the night, however...

"Captain!"

Shinasi popped into Brown's tent, which was lit up by slime oil lamps while the old man was pondering a map. The young man looked tired, his cheeks were still wet from the tears, and his hair was somehow in an even bigger mess than it usually was. He had been forgotten amidst the mess that was the after-battle cleanup. "I've got some... news."

"What is it, young man? How is your family?" asked Brown.

"Thankfully they're all fine. The old man especially – he had a bit of a close encounter with the Divine." Shinasi took a deep breath in. "All thanks to Ayomide's magic. They're both sleeping soundly in my house now."

"Oh, praise be to God! So, Ayomide used her magic and... last time she did that, she was out cold for the entire week." Brown got uneasy thinking of the military implications of their catgirl wizard being out-of-commission for a week. Still, his face was still and calm.

"I know that I shouldn't have let her go against orders, but--"

Brown raised his hand to signal him to stop talking. "Young man, we're all free men here as made so by the Lord. I'd think of it as a noble action for her to sacrifice a week of her life for your father, and I kindly ask you to not worry about it. God might have taken away one avenue, but he'll surely show a way out for the righteous. Or, in our case, a way *in* to the walls. Perhaps we'll have to wait a week for her to wake up, or perhaps we'll just have to siege our enemies until they surrender."

Shinasi couldn't help but be in doubt at the myriad plans of Brown. "Mister Brown, do you have *a* plan?"

"The only one to have one, singular plan is the Lord, young man. We, as flawed sinners on this earth, have to do our best to follow the path set forward by Providence to the best of our limited capabilities." Brown pointed at a piece of paper on the little portable desk of his tent. It had many scratching and writings on it. "Therefore, I don't have *a* plan. I have many plans, some admittedly better than others, and we'll go with the ones which'll work out when the time comes." Brown suddenly got excited. He had just made up an aphorism that he thought was good. "To put it succinctly: The first casualties of battle are plans." He smiled, not out of happiness but out of wisdom brought by age and a second life. "It cost me my life to learn not to stick too closely to one plan."

Shinasi put his hand on his heart. "You've done us well until now captain, so I'll be entrusting you with my life."

"The one in charge of your life is the Lord, not me, but I do appreciate the sentiment." Brown nodded towards the outside after having given his obligatory sermon. "Now, young man, you are discharged for today. Spend good time with your family before we set off tomorrow. Good night."

"Good night, captain. And, thank you." Shinasi left the tent and made way for his home. On the way home his head was tilted up towards the only thing he could see in the dark: the countless stars in the sky. He could have been holing up in some Adventurer's Guild building tonight, worrying about the fugitives running around while making meager pay. He was making no pay now, he was about as dead as these fugitives if ever caught, and perhaps he'd soon meet an otherworld in the battlefield. However, Shinasi smiled. He had something to live for, and that was a whole lot more important than living a life of middling comfort.

The young man carefully opened the door into his house as to not disturb anyone sleeping there. Under the moonlight he could see his sister sleeping next to Ayomide on the bedsheets that he had quickly set up. Shirin had practically collapsed from exhaustion the moment Ayomide had cast the spell, and the business of finding suitable bedding for everyone had fallen to Shinasi. On the other side was his father who, to Shinasi's surprise, had his eyes open.

"Father?" whispered Shinasi, slowly walking over and kneeling towards his father to see him closely. "How are you?"

"I've been better." replied Shinasi Sr. with the tired smile of an old man defying death. "Thank the Divine that I get to see your face once more, though I'd see you better if I wasn't lying down."

Shinasi pulled his father up to face him, taking this opportunity to give him a hug. "Thank It indeed, thank It indeed..." He was crying again. His father gave him a minute to weep as silently as he could in the middle of the night. "So, you must have a lot of questions."

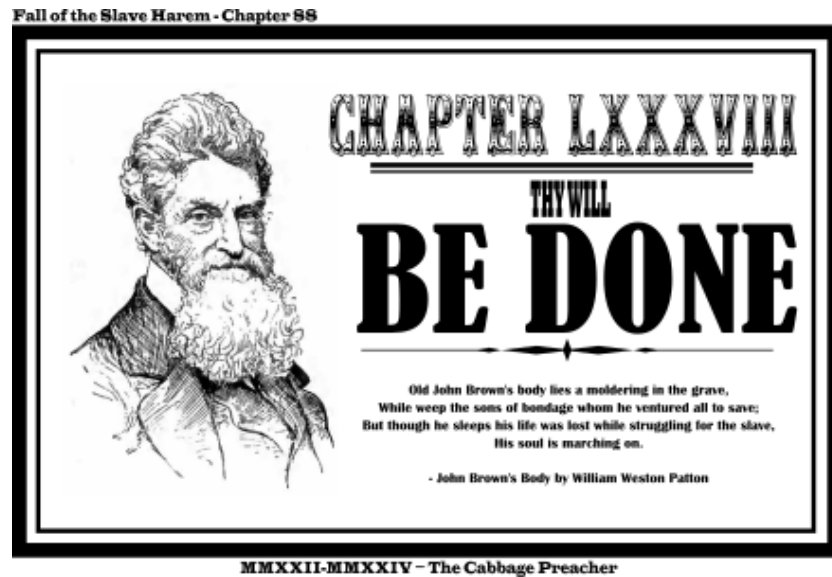
"I do – about how I'm alive, about who the darkskins marching around here are, and about why you're with them. However, you need to get some sleep first. I can have my answers later when your face doesn't make it look like you're about to collapse at any moment."

"A-alright..." Shinasi wiped his tears with his hands and unrolled himself a bedsheet to sleep on. "Good night, papa."

"Sleep well, son."

The Shinasi household closed their eyes and (would have) had some peaceful sleep (if not for the soldiers celebrating their victory next door).

Chapter 91: Chapter LXXXVIII – Thy will be done.



63rd of Summer, 5859

Yellowclover, Casamonu (League of Gileadites)

Today the sun shone on a new Yellowclover. Of course, one could argue that all matter was ever-moving and therefore ever-changing, which meant that a new sun was always rising over a completely new world, but that kind of shallow philosophical rambling was far from anyone's mind. That sort of rambling would have to be left for whenever Gemeinplatz was liberated and there was time for standing around idly and debating metaphysics.

For now, it was the time to rise and shine, and rise and shine Shinasi did in his house. He had certainly missed his humble abode. Compared to the mud huts of Libertycave the house wasn't much of an improvement in terms of construction, but it had the advantage of having his memories in its walls. The lords could have their palaces, the merchants their apartments, but Shinasi would rather keep his shack to retire to whenever his adventuring days would be over. Perhaps he'd need to expand the building a bit to house more people... he was daydreaming about such a possibility while looking at Ayomide who was still knocked unconscious on the other corner. Maybe he wouldn't need to expand the building considering how compact she was. *Maybe I should get out of bed instead of sitting on my behind.*

Shinasi slipped out of the bedsheets and didn't get his clothes on as he had fallen asleep with all his fighting gear already on him. His sides hurt from his belt biting into him all night. His body just felt sore all around from having marched all day yesterday, and there was another day of marching tomorrow. The young man turned his head to Ayomide again. It was fine. He was just going to have to march one more day. One day out of who-knows how many in the future, but it was going to be fine. *Probably. Hopefully. Maybe.* He finally stood up after having had enough internal struggle for the day, and he noticed that the house was empty except for Ayomide.

Thinking that the others must have gone out, Shinasi stepped outside to see a feast happening outside his door. All the soldiers had gathered around in a scattered donut-shape to receive food from a couple of cauldrons set outdoors. Those serving them were familiar to Shinasi: they were his

fellow villagers who had gotten to work on feeding those who had saved them. It wasn't too cheerful of a scene, mostly from the fact that these villagers had also just lost their friends and family. Still, they themselves having stayed alive seemed to have staved away potential gloom for the immediate moment. The scene was made unusual by the villagers and soldiers, lightskin and darkskin, sitting together in the field as equals. Curious children had surrounded the soldiers, so had even more curious adults, and the soldiers with curly hair had to chase away those trying to play with their hair without permission.

Looking through the crowd, Shinasi found Brown dining along with Shinasi Sr. Both the old men had laid themselves on the grass. They were talking about the "those old days" as those with advanced age tend to do.

"...and you know, one of my sons, he tried to slip out to play during Sabbath."

"What is 'Sabbath', Mister Brown?"

"On Sunday you see... I'll tell you all about it later. Young man, good morning." Brown waved to Shinasi looking at them from a short distance. "Your father's quite the curious fellow. He hasn't left me alone ever since he woke up."

"I'm sure he hasn't, captain." replied Shinasi Jr.

"I hadn't expected you to be... well, to be honest, I wasn't expecting you to be with anything... anything like this." Shinasi Sr. found himself lacking the vocabulary to explain John Brown's antics. The average peasant's political literacy hadn't seen much improvement ever since they saw the tax collector for the first time in their lives. "Ah... Anyways, I'm glad that you've found something to work towards in your life. Better for you to fight to save villages than for you to drift off into weird adventures and spend your time in the bawdy-"

Shinasi Jr. interrupted Shinasi Sr. by conspicuously clearing his throat. "Father, I think Mister Brown has heard enough details for today."

"I care not much for his background as long as he's standing before me as a noble man today." added Brown. "His... multiplicitous deeds with the fairer sex are to be judged later by the Lord." The way he squinted his eyes at Shinasi made him sure what Brown thought that judgement was going to be like.

"Yes, let's not talk about that today. I... Well, there was something I wanted to discuss with my father before all this happened." Now that Brown had explained the whole League thing to his father, Shinasi Jr. could skip the explanations and get right to the point.

"Oh? What'd that be, son?"

"Well..." Shinasi Jr.'s eyes shifted to Brown. *I guess there's no harm in telling him.* "I wanted to ask your permission- your... erm..." Shinasi felt his momentum dropping. Was this even the right time? *But then I may never have the chance to ask this again... I at least want to get this done before the siege.* "...I wanted to ask your permission to get engaged to a woman I've been courting."

"..." Shinasi Sr. was dumbstruck for a moment which proved to be way more than brief. He opened his mouth, closed it back, raised his hand, put it down, stammered a few syllables, and then he finally managed to say something intelligible "What?"

“Her name’s Ayomide, the woman you probably saw sleeping this morning, in our house.”

“...what?”

“I initially joined Captain Brown because I wanted to know who she was after she had saved me.”

“...*what?*”

“And, and, we have already... uhm... well, I can’t exactly ask her parents for permission, but I’m pretty sure she’d be willing.”

“...excuse me son, I need to... you, you’ve managed to court a woman?”

“Yes?”

Brown interjected “I can personally attest, on my honor as a man and a Christian, that these two are quite close together.”

“I... I never thought this’d happen! When are the grandkids coming?”

“...it’s a bit early for *that* father.”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

A bit later in the 63rd of Summer, 5859
Yellowclover, Casamonu (League of Gileadites)

Despite the great reception, the League of Gileadites had other things to do that day. So, without letting them laze off, Brown mustered the men once more. Things were looking Casamonuwards again. Unlike their departure from Azdavay, their departure from Yellowclover was a whole lot more eventful. Vaiz had to take his time to receive each and every blessing from the villagers, which took a good ten minutes. Some villagers had come along to join the soldiers in moving their supplies, and some had made generous donations to the League. After having made sufficient preparations, the League moved out with a promise to come back after sieging down Casamonu and capturing Sir Korvus II.

Shinasi was at the tail-end of the caravan as he was the one most busy with receiving farewells. Next to him was an ordinary cart being pulled by one of Ayomide’s officers. It contained Ayomide warmed in a blanket. She was still deep asleep, and she’d remain so for a while. All Shinasi had to do was survive until she woke up and he could deliver the news from his father. He shuddered. Hopefully he hadn’t just set a so-called “flag” by thinking about such things. Now, getting afraid of flags was only going to make it worse...

“Bah! I need a drink.” exclaimed Shinasi, prompting everyone to look at him as if he was a deranged lunatic. Unfortunately, he had to stay sober on the march, otherwise he had a real chance of getting trampled on by a marching column if he stumbled and fell down.

“You need a drink? We’re on the march!” This voice shocked Shinasi so much that he almost stumbled while mostly sober. It was Ayomide, who had risen up from her bed in the cart. “Good morning, you look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“How are you awake already? I mean, I’m glad, but-”

“Could you show your gratitude by getting me out of this cart?”

“Ah, yeah.” Shinasi leaned down to embrace Ayomide and lift her up from under her shoulders. Despite her short stature she was quite heavy. He’d have stayed like this for a bit longer if not for the fact that they were on the march, so Shinasi eventually set Ayomide down on the ground.

“So, I don’t know how I’m up.” Ayomide stretched her body after having laid motionless for more than an entire day. “I heard you scream about needing a drink, which made me want to shout at you to not drink on the march. That’s all I remember before I opened my eyes and shouted at you.”

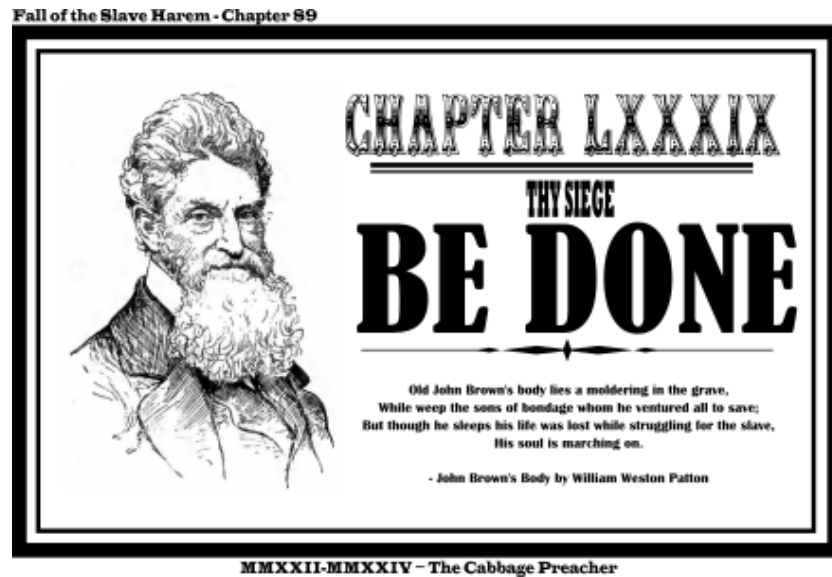
“As long as you’re up... and I’m not going to drink anything on the march, don’t you worry. Well, maybe a bit...” He thought of the sips he had stolen this morning from the communion wine.

“I’ll go report to the old man now. Don’t get anything while I’m away.” With that, Ayomide speeded off to inform John Brown of her miraculous recovery.

Shinasi had extended his hands forward to try and catch Ayomide, but she sped off way too quickly. He retracted his hand and put it into the fashionable pockets of his gambeson. There was time yet for him.

With an awakened Ayomide, the League of Gileadites continued marching on...

Chapter 92: Chapter LXXXIX – Thy siege be done.



Even later on the 63rd of Summer, 5859
The walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Sir Korvus II was anxious. Not because he was standing on walls which had only been newly rebuilt... okay, if he had to admit, standing on hastily rebuilt walls made him anxious as well. "Let's hope that these walls are good enough for you, Mister Dong."

"The Heavens will decide whether our fate shall crumble along with these walls or not." replied Master Long Dong. His eyes were half-closed and staring far into the distance while his long white robe fluttered in a most cool fashion along with his great beard. One looking at him from the outside would think that he was staring far into the future with his wise eyes. In reality, his eyes were just sore due to the sunlight directly hitting his eyes. The wind magic he cast to make his robes flutter only served to irritate his eyes further.

Korvus scoffed. "I'm sure that a horde of savages cannot bring down walls built by civilization. What are they going to do, hurl pebbles at the walls with their hands?"

Master Dong picked up a pebble left over from yesterday's repairs. He threw it up far towards the sky. "Perhaps." After a long minute, the pebble flew back down to his hand. "The Demon King is sure to be overpowered by himself. We'll be on watch for any cheat skills he surely has."

"...and you're thinking that whatever ragtag walls we have here can stop a demon king?" Korvus looked at the man right next to him. He suddenly felt that he had made a mistake by staying here, but there wasn't much he could do to escape the grip of an otherworlder cultivator.

Dong nodded. "We're here to melt his army down before things snowball out of control. I foresee that there will be no stopping him if we aren't to stop him now. Fortunately, I also foresee that we will stop him today."

Yes, Dong had seen it, but he hadn't understood it back then. The vision he had seen during his meditation had required reinterpretation with the intel he had gathered. The capital would burn, that

much was true, but not from the armies of the Demon King. A new order would rise and the empire would fall, that was also true, but it would be a new order built from the ashes with the guiding hand of an old architect from another world. This Demon King was just a catalyst, a moving force to give the architect the push he needed to enact this new order. “There is good in every evil, and evil in every good. We shall see much good from this evil.”

“If you say so...” Korvus really wanted to get away from the weirdos in the borderlands. He planned on taking all the money he got and locking himself away in a mansion in Hauptstadt with a load of jade beauties by his side. Maybe he’d buy a merchant ship or two to make passive income at the side so that his inheritance wouldn’t dry out, and that’s all the work he could bother to do. “I-”

“Ssh!” Dong put his hand over Korvus’ mouth. Shushing a nobleman like that would have normally given him the death penalty, but Korvus was also beyond caring at that moment. Dong completely closed his eyes, focusing on the presence just beyond the horizon. He could feel him. “John...”

“John who?”

“John these...” Master Long Dong had to stop himself from making a very immature joke at that moment. Such a low-quality joke would have ruined his LARP. “John, the Demon King.”

“A Demon King named John?” Korvus scanned Dong’s face to see if he was joking. Dong looked all too serious however. “Really? Would a Demon King have such a lame name?” Korvus kept looking at Dong with disbelief.

“I’m not the one who named him John! Raise your complaints about his name to him, not me.” Dong went quiet again to focus. There were many presences beyond the horizon. It must have been a decently-sized army, at least for Gemeinplatz standards. The cultivator opened his eyes again as his head began aching. He really needed to invent painkillers for such times. “They have an army coming here.”

“They do?” Korvus looked at the horizon. Everything seemed clear to him.

“Yes, get your men ready!” shouted Dong. He hated the “dimwit normies” as he called them. “*Qiánjìn!*”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Even later, but not much later, on the 63rd of Summer, 5859
Somewhere near the walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

“Here we are, ladies and gentlemen.” Brown rode his horse atop to a scenic hill overlooking Casamonu’s walls. The captains followed behind him with the soldiers not far behind. “Take a second to admire the scenery, this wonderful scene of Creation.” Brown did actually pause for a second. It was yet another hot summer day, the currently dry grass staying idle from a lack of wind. “Alright, I believe we have had enough of a break. Do your best to stay alive: we’ll have much more time to admire the scenery if you do so. Now, make camp!”

On the orders of the commander-in-chief, the captains broke into their companies and made their way towards the flat land below them. A squad lead by Tubman stationed themselves on the hill to stay on the lookout while the rest intended to be hard-at-work digging ditches surrounding the walls

and putting their sleeping bags down. The sky was darkening, and the men of the League didn't intend to attempt an assault after having marched for so long. Most of the soldiers were concerned with getting a good night's sleep under the watch of their poor comrades on patrol duty. The real fun would begin tomorrow when the big guns would come out to play.

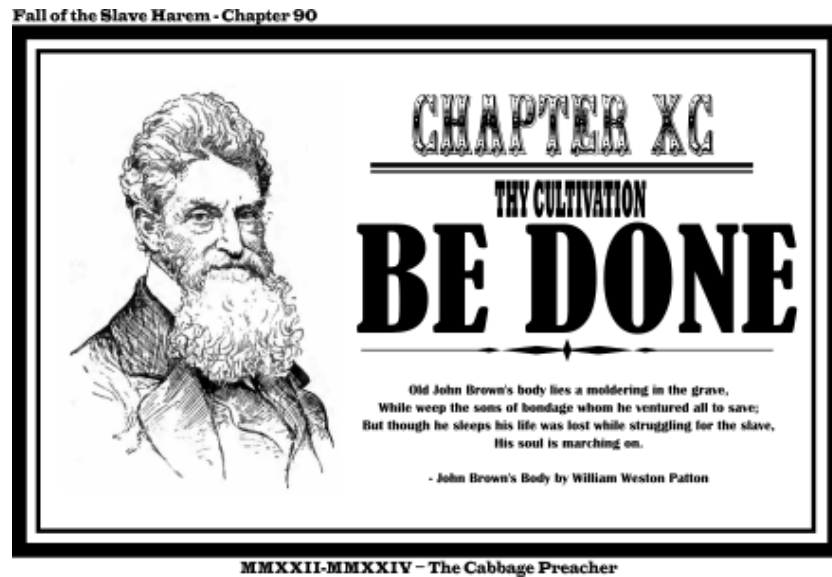
The training of the League paid off as the men worked quickly, quietly, and efficiently from a distance just far away enough that crossbow shots wouldn't reach them from the walls. The garrison of Casamonu did have firearms, and a few stray shots did make their way to their camp, but the defenders stopped their shots as they got ready to conserve their ammunition in case of a breach. Slowly and surely, the men of the League surrounded the city wall with their encampment. A proper siege required that nothing went in or out, and all the soldiers patrolling around the city would do their best to make sure of that. Even if they failed to breach the walls, the garrison would ideally surrender after running out of food, water or the will to stand idle on some wall for days on end. Even more ideally, that time would come soon.

"Young lady, our job is done for today. We, especially you, should get some rest for tomorrow." Just as Brown was about to separate from his captains and lay down after a long day of setting up camp, he heard quite the commotion coming from nearby. A few crackles, a few shouts and suddenly-

"John!"

There was an odd man in robes speeding towards him at inhuman speeds.

Chapter 93: Chapter XC – Thy cultivation be done.



Cultivation (noun): “Advancement or refinement in physical, intellectual, or moral condition.”

For those who cultivate, it’s an arduous process taking potentially myriads of years to get anywhere. Old masters with their flowing beards lock themselves in caves hidden in high mountains, young masters punch even younger masters for face-saving, and in the meanwhile the normies down below work hard for the sect.

Long Dong, despite being master of the Supreme Heavenly Immortal Taoist Sect, had at most cultivated for three years in total. All his other achievements had been made through convenient items left by respected masters he found by lucking out in auctions and other adventures which would require a novel of its own to describe in full. He hoped to gain power and ascend to yet another plane by slaying the Demon King there and then. His special attack, [Massive Ultimate Directional Attack], would rend the weak-looking old man right in front of him to shreds, smithereens, and several itty bitty pieces.

“John!”

Dong flew towards Brown, his robes frantically flapping in the wind from how fast he was leaping towards the Demon King. “[M.U.D.A.!]” he shouted. His vision became blur as his massive and ultimate attack swung towards Brown’s direction. The attack was simple, yet effective: Dong swung his entire body with one of his fists raised up high. The force of his entire body spinning usually obliterated anything that it came across. It felt like time stopped as the qi came flowing into him, first to his legs to help him make the spin and then to his fists to disrupt the qi of the Demon King and send him to an otherworld.

BAM!

Dong and Brown collided, and yet, the old man was smitten without being made into smithereens. Brown had managed to raise his hand and cusp the hand flying towards him. “Who are *you*?!” screamed the old man.

“I’ll ask the same thing, how did *you* block my secret attack?!” shouted back Dong. He jumped back to get a good deal of distance between him and the Demon King. *He was just meant to be an old otherworlder in my vision... how can such a puny old man of no renown block the Dong?!*

“It’s rude to answer a question with another question.” Brown leaped to get his M1 Garand before Dong could approach him again. Thankfully he had kept his rifle close at all times, it was right on the ground propped up against a tent this time, and the rifle was soon raised up against the cultivator. “Your intentions are no good, I assume.”

“Vanquishing the Demon King is nothing but good. Kowtow now and I may consider leaving your corpse intact.” Dong was biding for time, trying to read the old man. He was the Demon King of legend, sure, but “spawn camping” him should have led to an easy victory.

“I’m not kowtowing to anyone but the good Lord above, and with His help, none of us here will have to kowtow to anyone else.” Brown looked around him. The other captains were already running towards him. Perhaps they could defeat this odd martial arts bloke the same way they had defeated Kim.

“You are courting death, John. I’ll respect your choice.” Dong began circling his arms around his head. This even-more-special technique would surely vanquish the Demon King. “[Seven Crane Cradling Tech-]”

BANG! Clink!

Dong immediately reflected the bullet back to its sender. Intervening while somebody was in the middle of chanting the name of their attack was a crime punishable by death.

Clink! “Cào!” Brown moved away from where he was just in time for the bullet to reflect from a rock nearby.

Clink! Dong reflected it back.

Clink! Brown moved away from where he was just in time for the bullet to reflect from a rock nearby *again*.

Clink! Dong finally reflected the bullet away from Brown towards the earth so that it couldn’t reflect again. “*Cào nǐ zǔzōng shíbā dài*, what the hell are you?!”

“Avoid blaspheming please; God doesn’t like those who blaspheme.” Having given the cultivator a lesson in not saying “hell”, Brown himself took time to be surprised by what had just happened. “I am just a mortal man, one of the many sinners put on the Earth by Our Father in Heaven.”

“You...” Dong paused. He stood still to open his mind’s eye. He sensed the flow of qi around him. The old man was... “What the... How long have you meditated for?! How can a Demon King have so much pure life energy?”

“All day every Sunday, and whenever I can for the rest of the days of the week.” Brown was equally confused as the cultivator in front of him. Dodging bullets wasn’t something he usually did. “I know not what you are rambling about.” He had finally been the one to be confused by another’s ramblings rather than another being confused by his.

“You have eyes, yet you can’t see Mt. Tai?”

“What are you talking about...”

The meeting between a 19th century radical abolitionist and a cultivator from the 21st century wasn't going too well.

“I'm...” Dong noticed that Brown was now flanked by a shield-wielding guy and a gem-holding catgirl. “...I see you've bought yourself some time.”

“I'm not buying anything.” replied Brown. “Young lady, this man's quite the swift one. Young man, have your shield up.”

“I'm not here to fight your goons!” replied Dong. He circled his hands around again, not bothering to verbally name his attack for time's sake. [*Special Seven Crane Cradling Technique*]!

Dong released a wave of energy around him, visible to the non-cultivators as a wave of dust and earth being kicked up towards his enemies. It was a pretty wide-area attack which meant that it didn't do much damage, but it fulfilled its purpose by isolating Brown from his allies. Ayomide and Shinasi were knocked far away along with the rest of the onlookers, leaving Brown and Dong to duel with each other.

The two men were facing each other, and only each other, now that the field had been cleared.

Brown honestly didn't know what was happening. He had somehow dodged a bullet flying towards him, and now he was facing a stranger in battle. The old man knew not that his years of meditation had caused him to cultivate a whole load of qi he had never managed to unleash until he had faced death with Dong. Now John Brown had awakened without even realizing it, and he was about to unleash God's fury on this Earth.

“I'll be honest, I know not what is happening.” said Brown. He felt a great power surging within him, the power of cultivation. Plus, the old man was powered by the fact that he wanted to enact punishment on the man trying to stop abolition. “Regardless, let us duel.” He muttered a quick prayer before lunging forth at Dong.

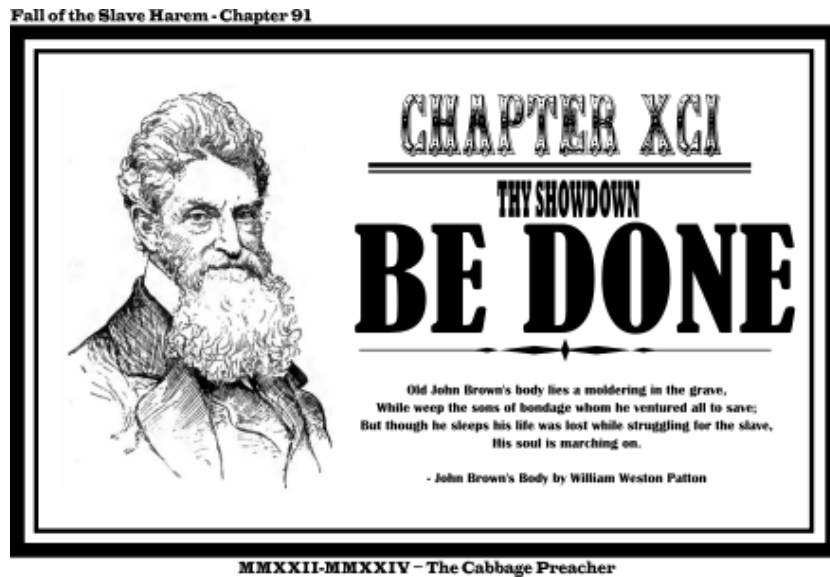
Dong lunged at him too, and the two otherworlders would have locked into combat with their fists if not for Brown smacking Dong with the butt of his rifle. Having expected only fists in a martial arts duel, the cultivator was taken off guard by the glorified club. A tooth flew off of his mouth, planting itself to the ground in anticipation of the tooth fairy. “Have you no honor?! You aren't supposed to use a club in this sort of duel!”

“Who said that?” asked Brown, readying his makeshift club for another strike. He flew right past Dong however, and ended up pounding nothing but air. Dong was ready for Brown's club this time. However, he was not ready for the bullet fired by Brown, and he barely managed to reflect it toward the heavens. They were jumping, practically flying in the air, trying to trade punches, clubs and bullets, only to end up missing each other. Both had gotten used to the simple tricks of the other by now.

Brown landed back on the ground, and Dong soon followed. Both men took a break after having been left breathless. John Brown's old body wasn't built for martial arts, and it had been a while since Long Dong had to exert himself this much. The cultivator hadn't expected to exert himself much at all today, and he was still in shock psychologically after having been countered by John Brown. ,

All they could do was stare each other down with killing intent...

Chapter 94: Chapter XCI – Thy showdown be done.



It's still the 63rd of Summer, 5859

Somewhere near the walls of Casamonu where two men have their fists raised against each other, Casamonu

Menacing. If one needed to describe the current atmosphere between John Brown and Long Dong in one word, which is a thing that one isn't wont to do but let's have a hypothetical here for the sake of making overly complicated hypotheticals that drag on for too long, then "menacing" wouldn't be a bad word. Both men were staring directly into each other's eyes, piercing each other's gaze, and planning on piercing each other's skulls with fists. Things were quiet, except for the rustling grass and the hopping grasshoppers to-and-fro-to-yonder.

Unfortunately for the grass down below and Brown up above, Dong's patience was running thin. He clasped his hands together and pushed them forward while opening them in an awkward motion while making noises like he had severe constipation. Thankfully the concentrated ball of energy he released was shining so brightly that nobody could see him to make fun of his moves. Brown leaned sideways preparing to avoid the ball with a swift leap, but he had a better idea right before the ball hit him. It was too late for him to avoid it, so the old man simply kicked the ball back. This somehow worked, a greater flash of light emanated from the point of contact between his shoe and the ball. The ball of light bounced up of Brown and exploded into flame with an ear-shattering bang. On the path to Brown, the grass had been burnt up by the ball of light.

Old man Brown prayed in thanks to the Lord for having allowed him to deflect an enormous ball of pure energy. He intended to pray a bit more, but his prayers were rudely interrupted by the annoying heathen right in front of him launching eight smaller balls of energy at once. This time Brown didn't like his chances, and the balls were a bit slower, so he began running away while the balls chased him.

"You coward! You witless geezer! Stop running!" Unfortunately for Dong, Brown didn't listen to his advice. Eventually the balls of energy dissipated and exploded in a similar fashion to their bigger counterpart.

There was a trail of burnt and burning grass behind Brown. “I’d say that the real coward is the one trying to beat an old man.” Despite his claims to being an old man however, Brown was proving to be quite nimble in this current moment. This time the energy balls came from the sky and Brown, being in his peak, leaped, somersaulted, and did a backflip just to not become part of the craters left behind by the balls of energy. His old bones were aching, but he felt the aching disappear as he breathed in, out, and let out a prayer or ten.

Time seemed to slow down when the old man closed his eyes. No, he needn’t run away or even see anything. He could instinctively feel the balls of energy fly towards him. His body took over. With his power surging, he kicked, and then added a punch, and then headbutted the last one. There was even more burnt grass around him when he finally opened his eyes.

“What the...” Dong was beginning to lose order in his breathing. There was a line of blood streaming down his nose, both from exertion and from frustration. His opponent was getting better at cultivation in real-time. What had he unleashed upon this not-Earth? The best thing to do was retreat, and retreat Dong did with his tail between his legs. He jumped back, and then let loose a barrage of glowing chains from his sleeves to restrain the old man.

Brown, however, was not the type to be okay with being restrained by chains. He yanked the chain with both his hands and dragged the Dong back to himself. Dong flew towards Brown, confused about the fact that the old man wanted even more.

Long Dong was ready however. He raised his fists up high to protect against Brown punching or kicking him. He readied his instincts to matrix himself out of rifle fire. He even solidified qi around him to protect himself in case of any attacks using pure energy. He was sure that he could receive any attack he had seen from Brown up until now.

Then Brown took out something from his pockets and threw it towards Dong.

Soap? This was the last thing Dong thought before his head collided with a bar of soap in the air. He had expected a projectile to fly towards him, not for him to fly towards a projectile.

So quick was his collision that he passed out.

So quick was Brown’s fist that he didn’t wake up ever again.

Long Dong couldn’t defy fate.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Yep, it’s still the 63rd of Summer, 5859

**Somewhere near the walls of Casamonu where a bunch of soldiers have been pushed to,
Casamonu**

“Urgh...” Shinasi was trying to get closer and closer to the two men trading fists. However, there seemed to be some sort of invisible barrier he couldn’t get past no matter how much he pushed it. He pushed and pushed forward, yet it felt like he was trying to get past a wall made of pure slime. “Captain, hang in there!”

“Old man!” Ayomide knocked on the barrier as well. However, she took a pause when she noticed what was happening inside the barrier. It was wild, to say the least. The old man in question was doing feats of acrobatics which she had never seen before in her life. “Hang- hang in there?!”

The next few minutes was jaw-dropping to the spectators outside of the cultivator's barrier. John Brown was dealing a beatdown the likes of which had never been seen before in the history of the remote edges of Gemeinplatz. It was quite hard to follow with all the balls of light flying around and old men jumping around, but it was still a good watch for the soldiers around the barrier. Some sat on the grass, watching the fight in lieu of entertainment. Some were cheering on. Some were biting their nails, thinking of what'd happen if they got enslaved again.

Thankfully, for the fans of John Brown, the old man's soap saved the day as the barrier came down with the defeat of the cultivator. Shinasi fell face-first as he had been leaning on the barrier, while Ayomide saved herself with a well-timed gust of wind to keep herself on her two feet. There was a rush towards the scene of the battle filled with craters. Brown had knelt down on the ground, breathing in and out deeply while his forehead was riddled with beads of sweat.

"Old man? Are you fine?" Ayomide had ran up to Brown, ready to cast some healing if need be. She didn't as the old man was fine, at least physically.

"Praise be to God, I'm fine." Brown coughed up some blood and stained his coat. "Mostly."

"Mostly?" *Coughing up blood doesn't make you look fine...*

"Mostly. I've been worse." added Brown, having literally died once after being hanged. "I just need some sleep." He yawned a bit too casually for someone who had died once.

"A-Alright..." Ayomide now looked at the lifeless body of Dong laying right next to where Brown was. She, and many of the men, were mostly desensitized to corpses by now. One of the soldiers covered the body with a blanket for later burial. Nobody really knew how to conduct a funeral for an otherworlder, neither did they really have enough respect to conduct proper rituals for those trying to kill them, so enemy bodies would simply be buried. The rest of the night passed with the League resetting their camp which had been destroyed by the unexpected cultivator attack.

Tomorrow, the siege would finally start.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

Right around the end of 63rd of Summer, 5859
The walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Sir Korvus was waiting. And waiting some more. The skies had darkened, yet he was waiting. From his position, he was only seeing a light show and he couldn't distinguish between the two vague humanoid blobs clashing down below. "It's taking Dong a while to cut off the head of the snake..."

Things would have been easy after the troops of the Demon King were demoralized with the aforementioned Demon King being defeated. Either they'd dissolve and Korvus wouldn't have to deal with them, or they'd try and siege the castle down in a futile attempt. There was no way that a bunch of headless savages had the ability to bring down the walls of civilization, so Korvus wasn't worried about potentially being sieged down.

All he needed to do was wait for Dong to come back with the good news.

Sir Korvus was waiting.

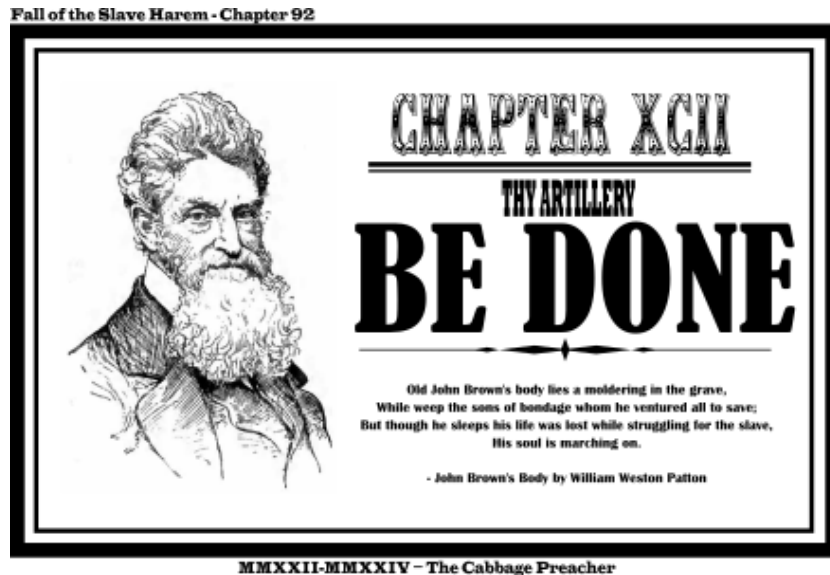
And waiting some more.

The stars had come out, yet he was still waiting.

He'd wait for a long while more.

Chapter 95: Chapter XCII – Thy artillery be done.

[The John Brown Isekai has a TVTropes page now!](#) I encourage all willing viewers to contribute to spread the good word of the John Brown Isekai!



It's not the 63rd of Summer 5859 anymore, it's the 64th of Summer 5859
The walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Things weren't looking so brightly for Sir Corvus. He had gone to sleep last night hoping that the situation would get brighter, but the only thing to brighten had been the sky and nothing else.

There were no Dongs in open sight, no cultivators who'd save him, only the siege camp which had surrounded the walls and blocked an easy escape for Sir Corvus. He was about to curse the fool who had made the decision to mount a defense, before he realized that he was about to curse himself. Not wanting to curse himself any further, he saved his curses for the Demon King, that damnable commander of savages. Staring down from the walls, he saw the savages down below who looked no different from ants. Oh, how he would love to crush them...

Sir Corvus had, of course, been busy with things other than fantasizing about crushing his enemies while standing atop a wall. While he didn't think that the savages mounting a successful siege was possible, he also wanted to be ready for any surprises like the one which had happened yesterday. He had commanded his troops to position what few cannons he had around the walls and fill them with shrapnel in case the savages tried to go over the walls. Casamonu didn't have much gunpowder in storage, nor could they get more when they were surrounded by enemies, so those cannons would only fire if the enemy got close enough to secure a hit. The garrison was marching 24/7 to make sure that nobody could even get close to the walls without being pelted with arrows until they were buried six feet under.

Corvus had also considered arming a militia composed of the citizens of the town, but then the concept of arming the common people made him a bit too scared to even think further about trying it out. He did still plan on looting the town of everything valuable when he left, and doing that would be hard with an armed population to resist him. For now, he was content with letting himself

be seen as the last line of defense before the savage forces of the Demon King, nay, he *was* the last line of defense before the savage forces of the Demon King. As his noble blood demanded he'd defend the people of this town, and then leave after taking his just due. The ever-so noble Sir Corvus had already made all the justifications he needed to make himself feel good about being a glorified bandit. Perhaps, in another world, he would have become an Olympic-level mental gymnast.

With the ants below scurrying to conduct their pitiful siege, Corvus couldn't help but feel relieved and let out a boisterous laugh. "Ha! What was I worrying about?" What were these savages going to do, run up the walls and enter the city from above?

Suddenly, a **BANG**, and the earth below shook along with the heavens above. Corvus almost fell butt-first on to the ground. He looked below from his high walls, to where the explosion had come from. There was a newly-formed smoking crater down below. Was it some sort of magic summoned by the Demon King? He looked intently at the colony of ants down below. Where was the magic coming from?

All Corvus saw was a black blur pass above his head before he heard another explosion right above his head. This one grounded him and everyone around him as shrapnel whizzed past or into them. Corvus had gotten lucky and his helmet had blocked a broken shard of clay from shattering his cranium. A poor soldier right next to him hadn't been so lucky, and his brain wasn't functioning at all anymore. Those who had been injured were crying out in pain.

It was pure cacophony, one which Corvus had to quickly retreat from back to security. He crawled on the ground with his ears ringing, swearing to crush the dirty ants below him who had forced him to such an embarrassing position.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

64th of Summer 5859
Below the walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Ayomide squinted her eyes, trying to get a good view of the explosion which was very far away from her. She, and the others around her, only saw a distant brief fiery explosion followed by a cloud of thick gray smoke above the walls. It was so far away that she couldn't hear the explosion. "...did that even do anything?"

Brown nodded with satisfaction at the results of their artillery test. "I can assure you that they aren't too happy about the fireworks show that we are putting on, young lady. Load up another round, gentlemen!"

There was a veritable artillery crew around a copper tube which looked far from a proper piece. The tube was affixed on top of a few bags of grain held steady by planks. A few of the more muscle-laden soldiers had been tasked with repositioning the artillery every time it fired, and Rabanowicz was in charge of mentally doing ballistic calculations to make sure that they were positioning everything correctly. Watanabe was right next to her, drawing calculations on the earth with a stick to verify Rabanowicz's mental math.

However, theory and math enough were far from being enough to fire this cannon, or any other cannon for that matter. Bilal had sent a team of skilled kiln workers along with the cannon delivery to set up a kiln. Brown had originally requested cannonballs to be made at Libertycave, but Bilal

had decided that it'd be far better to set up a simple kiln in the camp itself to make the cannonballs. The cannonballs in question were clay balls packed with pebbles, metal scrap, and anything else which would potentially hurt a person. Inside them were also a whole load of gunpowder, courtesy of the smugglers which had left the gunpowder in an unmarked location near Casamonu for them, and a fuse (hemp rope doused in oil) sticking out ready to be lit.

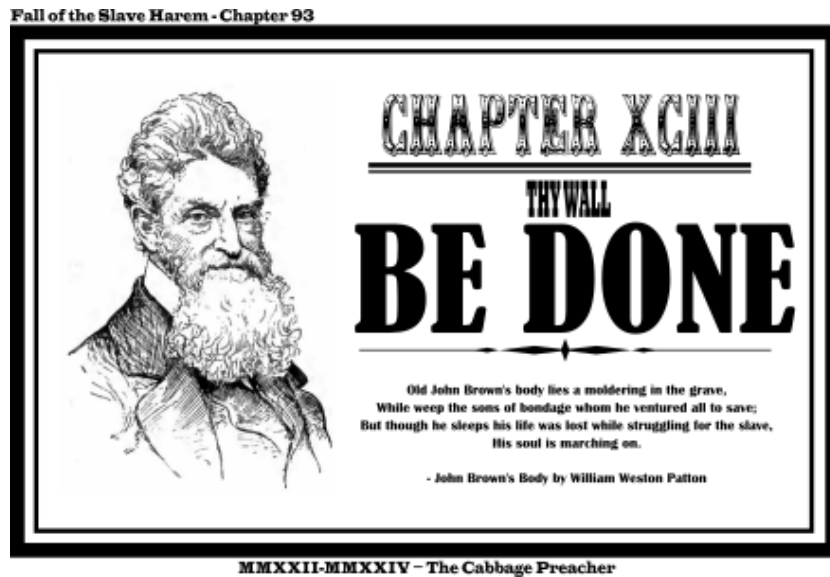
A soldier rolled a newly-baked cannonball into the copper tube. It rolled down the tube, eventually seating itself with a loud *thunk* at the bottom. Rabanowicz ordered some last-minute adjustments to the angle and position of the cannon before it was ready for fire. Firing the cannon was relatively easy: Ayomide first shone a concentrated beam of light to light the fuse and then, before the cannon exploded in their faces, she cast a very strong gust of wind right inside the cannon itself. The compressed air, stuck between the walls of the cannon and the cannonball, pushed the cannonball with great force that launched the cannonball fast enough to reach the walls. There was another flash of light and more smoke as the cannonball hit the wall directly this time. Unfortunately, the damage great enough to immediately bring down the walls, gunpowder as an explosive wasn't too strong and the clay cannonball itself wasn't hard or fast enough to do much damage, but the explosion by itself was enough to demoralize the garrison up above the weakening walls.

"We need it a bit down, to damage the foundations of the wall. Also, the explosion is too early, we need it to explode right next to the wall. Get a longer fuse." commented Rabinowicz, watching the explosion do its thing. Immediately the cannon was lowered and a longer fuse was attached to the cannonball. This was far from an exact science, with the cannon being wildly inaccurate and the fuses varying wildly in how fast they burned. Sometimes it was too early, sometimes it was too high, sometimes the fuse refused to light up.

Still, it was much better than having no cannon at all no matter how odd the cannon was compared to its contemporaries. Almost all cannons in Gemeinplatz would propel a cannonball through the explosion of gunpowder and break down walls with sheer kinetic force from the speeding hunk of metal or stone. However, the League didn't have enough bronze or iron to cast any cannons capable of handling an explosion inside its chambers. Therefore, they were using wind magic to propel a lighter projectile with explosives inside it to try and get a similar effect to a conventional cannon. It wasn't proving to be as effective, but the walls would have to come down eventually once they were pounded on enough. Probably. Hopefully.

The artillery crew loaded another cannonball into the Libertycave cannon, and the people on the wall got ready for another explosion. This was going to be a long siege.

Chapter 96: Chapter XCIII – Thy wall be done.



65th of Summer 5859 The walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

It was a hellish night, especially for those guarding the walls of Casamonu. Their day had been ruined by one simple thing:

BOOM! Crackle...

A group of noisy neighbors had arrived to pound their walls in quite the rude manner. What's worse, quite unlike a noisy neighbor's kid making noise, the League had grown large enough to be a danger to their livelihood. Plus, the neighbor's kids usually didn't have an explosive cannon manned by a revolutionary catgirl wizard capable of bringing down castle walls.

Without the HOA anywhere in sight, the defenders on the walls had to deal with their neighbors by their lonesome. Sir Corvus had ordered the cannons of the city to shoot at the one cannon down below, but with a lack of experienced artillery crew, his artillery only managed to pound the earth around the cannon. Soon he had found himself out of gunpowder, and that was that for their cannons. Now they stood idle like the useless bronze tubes they were.

All that Corvus could do, and what he was doing right now, was ordering his men around to make sure that they were plugging the walls. Every mason in Casamonu had been drafted to reinforce the side of the walls which were being pounded by the cannon. Such a draft was justified in the face of this aggression shown to them by the Demon King outside of the walls. It was a heroic effort in their eyes, suitable for those who were living to see the avatar of evil in the flesh attack their city. A line of clergymen lined up next to the hardworking masons, quoting scripture at them for motivation while doing no physical work themselves. Corvus himself joined the clergymen in doing no real work; a lord such as Corvus would never stoop so low to touch a bucket of mortar.

BOOM! Crackle...

Another section of the wall was hit, and pebbles along with dust flew off the wall and flew into the faces and mouths of the masons. There was a bout of coughing and swearing while the old stone masons tried to reorient themselves after the explosion. The section that they had been repairing had gotten hit again. Normally having to work on fixing the same thing again would have been mildly annoying, but it was more of a life-and-death situation than annoying for those on the walls.

BOOM! Crackle...

With their adversaries down below getting better and better at aiming, the explosions had gotten even more accurate and frequent. The same section had been hit again. The masons got to work to try and plug the cracks forming in the wall before it'd completely collapse.

BOOM!

This time, the explosion was right above their heads. A couple of the masons and the soldiers overwatching them were wounded from the shrapnel. The wall was yet to be patched up. As the cannons were loaded back up again, the masons saw that the wall wouldn't survive another round. They ignored the soldiers surrounding them and ran for it, running away from the weakened section.

BOOM! Crackle!

From a solitary old man in a cave, to a dozen fugitives, to a force numbered with three digits...

Brown and his men had gotten far in their march on, far enough to breach the walls of an actual castle.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

65th of Summer 5859
Below the walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Ayomide was feeling sleepy. Also bored. She was bored after having had to stand right next to this abominable copper tube without doing anything but cast wind magic. Everyone around her had stopped talking after having stood in the same spot with her for the last day. The excitement of battle had been, as is usually the case, replaced with sheer boredom as the siege dragged on to its second day.

"How are you faring, Lady Orange? Are the accommodations suitable around here for your royal tastes?" Here he was, to at least relieve her of some boredom. Shinasi dropped by the cannon after having finished patrolling the place and making sure that nobody inside Casamonu was trying to get out.

"It's not as good as my royal seat covered with purple satin attended by my team of a hundred servants, but it'll have to do." Ayomide yawned after having launched another cannonball.
"Somebody should get me a chair to sit on, at least."

"Ayomide, we don't have any chairs in the entire camp." Such luxuries were far away from a makeshift siege camp "I haven't found any chairs in the wild either, so we're out of luck."

"Yeah, yeah." Yet another round was launched by Ayomide. They had been stockpiling cannonballs whenever her magic power ran out, and they had lots in the stockpile to quickly load into the

cannon. “We’ll get to sit all we want when we siege this place down. Who knows, you might even find yourself an actual seat covered by purple satin?”

“If I find such a good seat, I’m firmly planting my butt on it and never moving it again.” replied Ayomide. The march, the scuffle in the village, she already had enough action to last her for the rest of her life despite her being only at the start of the battle against slavery. She’d have retired already if not for... well, Ayomide didn’t exactly know it at herself at that moment.

“I’ll make sure to shop for a good satin seat when we’re in town, then. Hopefully the shopkeepers will be a bit more responsive to us in our second visit.”

“I have the slightest suspicion that they’ll have to be a bit more responsive to us.”

Ayomide launched another cannonball, which cut their conversation in half. Following the great ball of smoke from the exploding cannonball was another greater ball of grey smoke as a wide section of the wall gave up on standing and crumbled down. There was a rumble which reached even the ears of the siege camp. After that, silence. The wall was rubble, and the rubble wasn’t a wall.

Through the breached wall, Ayomide could see the city itself. Or, she could see the rooves of the building from this far away at least.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

65th of Summer 5859
Casamonu, City of Casamonu

Sir Corvus had, after having built up the courage to go up on the walls, almost been crushed under the rubble of the collapsing wall. His fine fur cape was now dirtied by dust, and his mood had been sullied by his new neighbors.

“Sir! Sir, are you fine?” A retainer ran to Corvus, helping him get up.

“I’m not! I’m not...” He looked at the breach. It was big, but... “They can’t defeat us if we continue to defend in the city. Get the men to calm down and go back to their positions!”

The retainer responded with a salute “Yes, sir! Anything else?”

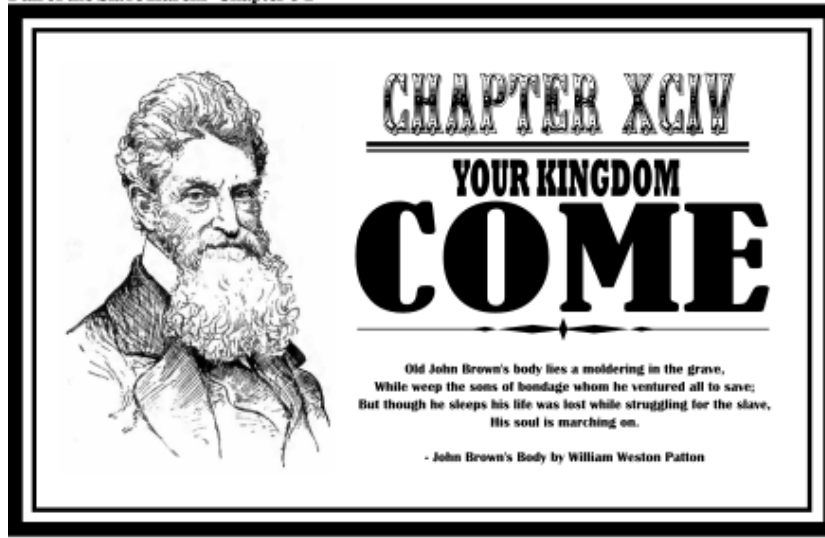
“We must make sure that they don’t dare enter this breach. Station all available garrison members to around here, and make sure that the masons are here as soon as possible to repair this mess! That’s all, now get out!”

“Understood, sir!” The retainer made a run for it, leaving Sir Corvus alone. An urban area, walls or not, was a defensible position to have. The savages below, with their copper spears and helmets, couldn’t possibly win if they tried to assault the city itself. The cramped streets of a city made for excellent chokepoints which he’d use to choke the fugitives if they tried to enter the city. Hence, as long as Sir Corvus’ men weren’t forced out of the walls due to running out of food or water, they could defend this place indefinitely. Most luckily for Sir Corvus, he had already made quite the stockpile of food with all the raids he had conducted in the rural areas of Casamonu. He estimated that they could last for half a year, and by then reinforcements from the Empire would surely come to relieve his forces.

Sir Corvus would be fine *as long as* his food stocks were fine.

Chapter 97: Chapter XCIV – Your kingdom come.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 94



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

65th of Summer 5859

Below the walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

A black, starry blanket had covered the entirety of Gemeinplatz. Under it was many things, from sleeping wild animals to awake “civilized” animals who were going about their illicit nighttime business.

Among these civilized animals was a human named Ayda, the head of an extensive smuggling ring in Casamonu and former love interest of some insignificant bloke named Shinasi. She was travelling in the middle of a forest, reached by the underground tunnel system that Brown and co. had passed before to smuggle textiles, all by herself in a move that even she found to be irrational. She had passed this place countless times before, so she had no problem navigating the trees by intuition. She went a bit north, then a lot west, before turning three times and walking ten steps forth to find herself out of the woods and into a path leading to Casamonu.

The full moon shined on Ayda, so bright was it that she felt like she was on the moon itself. She saw her surroundings somewhat clearly, as grey and pale as her surroundings were under the moonlight. What wasn't grey and pale were the campfires lit up by soldiers keeping watch for any intruders like her. It was odd to see such a large group of armed fugitives, but Ayda wasn't going to complain about those giving her extra business. She casually walked up to the soldiers, waving at them like she was walking into her own house. The soldiers, just doing their job with nothing personal, raised their spears up and got ready for their encounter with the strange woman who had come out of the dark. Her dark robes and fashionable leather gear didn't help her look less suspicious.

“Stop right there witch, or whatever you are!”

Just as she was about to open her mouth to explain the purpose of her visit, Ayda had to turn around and raise her arm. Behind her was an even shadier lady in dark robes, who had a knife wielded by her arm which had just been blocked by Ayda. “Good going, you just about got me.”

“I wasn’t trying to get you. I just wanted a closer look.” replied the other lady in black, who had withdrawn her arm along with the knife.

“Do you usually take a closer look at people with a knife on your hand?”

“I don’t have a knife in my hand *right now*.”

“You just did- whatever.” Ayda sighed and gave up on the futile argument. “I was called here by your boss.”

“Yes, we, and I, were looking for you. I assume you’re the correct person. I don’t think there’s anyone bold enough to walk into a military camp without permission.” Kyauta had clearly not heard of what spies did.

“You’d be surprised at what people get up to for the right money.”

“You’d be surprised at what some people have to get up to for *no* money. Follow me.”

Ayda expected way more security for such a location of a military nature, but she was allowed to walk behind Kyauta without anyone else guarding her. Not that they needed to send anyone to guard and watch over her – the soldiers in the camp were closely watching the stranger who wore even stranger clothing. Walking through the camp, watching the armed fugitives, Ayda wondered what state the world had come to. She had been bombarded with clergymen in the streets rallying people in defense of the town against the Demon King, and then she had been bombarded with actual cannonballs as the walls of Gemeinplatz met Ayomide. She couldn’t help but believe that someone capable of leading an army of fugitives against a walled city must be the Demon King of legend, and she was right in the middle of his lair.

After a brisk walk, Ayda found herself entering a modest tent. Far from the lair of a demonic entity, the tent was... to put it clearly, the inside of the tent looked like how she’d expect the inside of a tent to be. A bedroll on the side, a bag or two on another side, and nothing else but the earth beneath and the tent above to protect one from the elements. In the middle was an old man who looked nothing special except for his magnificent white beard. “Welcome, Miss Ayda was it?”

“Yes, top of the night to you.” She sat on the floor, finding herself alone save for the old man right in front of her. He seemed to be judging her with his eyes, though his gaze didn’t bore deep enough to actually read her mind through magical shenanigans. Aya stared back at the old man, pondering in the silence as to when the Demon King would show up. Sure, she had seen the old man before come to her, but such an old timer would definitely just be an underling and not the embodiment of all that is doom and gloom.

Brown ended the uncomfortable bout of silence with a cough. “...and I am Isaac Smith or, as the people here know me and you should refer to me from now on, John Brown. Glad to meet you again, you have been a great help to us.”

Ayda looked around her again, making sure that she wasn’t being fooled somehow. “...I was called here to meet your boss. Is he busy right now?”

Brown raised his brow, confused. “I’m the Commander-in-Chief of the League, though I definitely wouldn’t call myself ‘the boss’. The only one above us here is the good Lord above.”

Ayda looked above, only seeing the walls of the tent again. Perhaps they preferred the title “Demon Lord” rather than “Demon King”. “Then I want to see your lord as soon as possible.”

“Miss Ayda, we’ll all get to see Him eventually. No need to rush when you’re so young.” Sensing the point of the conversation float away from where it should be, Brown paused his evangelizing for a second. “I was the one who called you here, to ask for your help.”

The old man did look to be some sort of right-hand man to the Demon King (Demon Lord?), so Ayda stopped trying to search for the big bad evil guy and get on with business. “Alright then. What do you need help for? More gunpowder? More textiles? More of anything? The only thing we can’t find is food right now, the big git at the top has been rationing it pretty strictly.”

“No, we have no need of any more physical goods for now. The opposite in fact – we need to have fewer physical goods in the hands of the count. Your last point is of particular interest. How is the food situation in Casamonu?”

“The men of Corvus have been selling food at a very high price. He practically has the market cornered, the clever bastard. You can see huge lines forming in front of the castle walls every day.”

“So, all the food in town is stored in one location?” Brown raised his brow so high that his forehead disappeared amongst a sea of wrinkles.

“Yes, but they have... Well, I’m not your scout now, am I?” Ayda simply shrugged, and then extended an open palm forward. “A little donation, if you would be so kind.”

“Greed is a horrible sin, Miss Ayda, and I pray that the Lord cures you of it, but I’ll humor you and give you a great deal.” He pretended to take out a pouch of money from his pockets, only to take out a folded piece of paper and leave it on Ayda’s hands. She unfolded the paper expecting it to be a cheque or something else of a monetary nature, only to find some sort of contract written and signed by Commander-in-Chief John Brown.

Without waiting for Ayda to read it in full, Brown began laying the basics of his proposal through speech. “Simply put, Miss Ayda, we’ll need a bit of help from enterprising individuals like you in the future. For now, you’re considered a criminal from violating the laws of the Empire and the country, but we’ll give you a pardon and funding to conduct your business legally. The League won’t enact mercantile laws as strict as the Empire’s, so you should be able to thrive without having to hide behind the backstreets.”

Ayda took a pause. A very long pause, going over every word on the written contract. It was dangerous to make contracts with devilish influences like that of the Demon King, but she couldn’t find anything unexpected in the text. She would be pardoned of all the times she broke the mercantile laws of Casamonu, receive funding for the production of gunpowder and facilitating trade into the League, and be given a certain amount of land to be appropriated from soon-to-be-isekai’d nobility. From her perspective, this seemed like an excellent deal as long as she helped the fugitives into the city. She understood this to be Brown’s goal: she wouldn’t be able to receive anything from the deal unless she threw Casamonu into the hands of the Demon King. It was truly a deal with the devil. Ayda wasn’t the type to turn seedy deals down, but even this seemed too far for her. “This is the oddest deal I’ve ever received in my life.”

“In which way, if I may ask? I think it’s a pretty simple one.”

“It’s odd in that... well, you deal with fugitive slaves, you deal with demi-humans, and now you deal with some smuggler as if she were a respectable burgher.” Ayda removed her eyepatch, revealing a closed eyelid behind which no eyeball stood. “I haven’t a shred nor have ever had a shred of nobility or respectability Mister Brown – I lost this eye in my youth in the slums where my late mother had born me as the bastard. My father is a nameless slave whose name I don’t know. I don’t know where you come from, but you look to be a well-bred man, perhaps an otherworlder, the type to never deal with fugitives or bastards.”

“Is that the problem?” This was definitely not the first time that Brown was receiving such a question. He had a simple answer. “I would rather have the small-pox, yellow fever and cholera all together in my camp, than a man without principles. Noble blood doesn’t make up for principles, neither does ignoble blood mean a lack of principle. Far from it – I have seen that men of highest stature tend to also be men of lowest principle. In the eyes of Omnipotence all men are made equal; in my eyes, a shrewd woman like you who has conducted fair business with us is worth way more than any emperor.”

Worth more than an emperor? These words had left Ayda shocked. Brown would have been drawn and quartered for having uttered the first letter of such a sentence. She was on the guard for flat flattery, but she could feel clearly that Brown was genuine in his speech.

Brown continued. "It's a mistake, madame, that people make, when they think that bullies are the best fighters. Give me men of good principles, God-fearing men, men who respect themselves, and with a dozen of them I will oppose any hundreds of such men as the ruffians hiding behind that castle.”

Having felt that he evangelized enough, Brown procured a thin piece of charcoal for Ayda to write her signature with. Soon enough, she had signed the agreement, and less sooner but soon enough nonetheless, the League was cooking plans to infiltrate the castle thanks to Ayda’s intel.

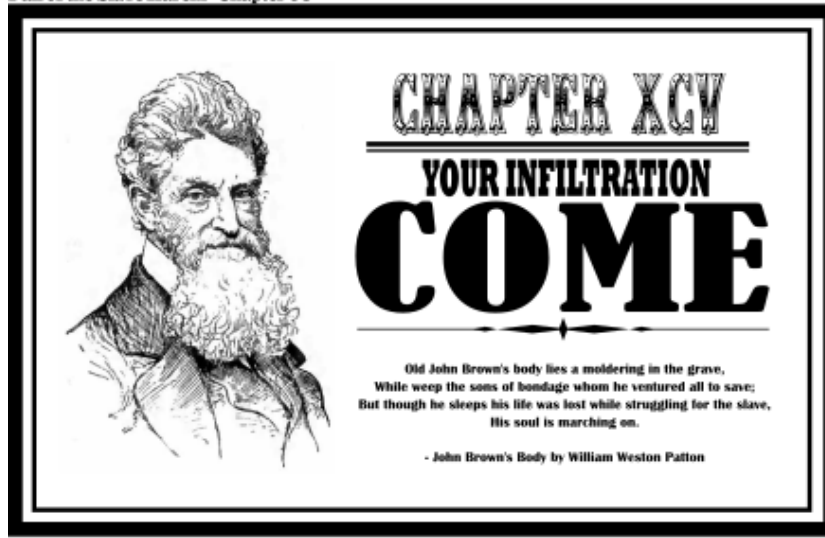
Hello, you may be wondering why this week's chapter has released early. It's because today is a special day, and I wanted to celebrate with an early chapter:



Today is the day that *Touhou Renkyouto ~ Subterranean Festival of Love and Jealousy* releases on Steam. It's a top-down bullet-hell shooter, and after a year of work, hopefully it's been worth the wait. If you're interested in the game (or supporting me), [feel free to check its page on Steam](#). I'd be very happy to receive your support :)

Chapter 98: Chapter XCV – Your infiltration come.

Fall of the Slave Harem - Chapter 95



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

65th of Summer 5859

Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

Casamonu Castle: a grand and somewhat new castle, established several millennia after the Empire of Gemeinplatz had been born. The castle overlooks Casamonu itself alongside the ruins of all the Casamonus before it which paint the environment in various shades of gray with rubble. For the last week, the castle had been housing the ever-important supplies of grain and other non-perishables required for Casamonu to survive the siege. Such an important castle requires excellent protection, and excellent protection requires experienced guards.

Unfortunately, experienced guards require money. Money that Sir Korvus definitely couldn't afford to spare for some men to stand around all day checking a gate.

"So, what're you doing this weekend?" asked Billy (whole real name was still Bilaleddin), who had survived many a political chaos and gotten himself reassigned to protect the castle of the count. Such a prestigious job meant that he had finally managed to afford himself a tabard to cover his gambeson filled with unfixed holes.

"...don't you have anything else to talk about?" replied Bob (who real name had been Boron until he had gone to court last week and legally changed his name to be Bob), who too had survived many a political chaos and found himself stuck with the idiot right next to him. He too had managed to save up to buy a tabard, and the tabard had made him look professional enough to be assigned right next to the castle gates.

"Not really. There hasn't been anything to do due to those bloody savages." Billy scoffed with such derision that one wouldn't be mistaken to think that he could bring down a whole sieging army down just with pure scorn.

"Right, everywhere is boarded up... even the nunnery!"

“The nunnery? My wife and I were planning to visit them to bless our marriage this weekend, are they not accepting visitors?” Billy had become visibly disappointed in not being able to get himself blessed as soon as possible.

Bob hadn’t meant the sacred sort of nunnery, but he kept his cool. “...is the nunnery an appropriate place to bless one’s marriage? Isn’t that usually done in a temple?”

Billy shrugged. “When I showed my old man the girl I wanted to marry with, all he said was ‘leave her at the nunnery’, so I’m doing just that.”

Bob gave up on trying to dig into Billy’s family and instead turned forward to dig into the night. It was completely dark as the new moon was hidden behind a menagerie of clouds. The only thing lighting them were the lanterns they were generously given by the castle’s owner. Everyone was asleep, so it was all quiet save for Billy’s yappings. So quiet in fact, that Bob preferred to speak to Billy more instead of getting bored out here all alone. Bob was searching for some conversation topic to open to his comrade just before he heard faint footsteps approaching the door. “Halt! Who goes there?”

“Me goesh ‘eer!” The reply came from a man who sounded most chemically inconvenienced. “Where thish?”

Bob sighed, even though he was happy to get some action. The drunk man approached them close enough for his spiky, disheveled black hair to be visible. His gambeson and a shield haphazardly attached to his back suggested that he was an adventurer of some sort. “Great, it’s a drunk. Billy, do you know how to deal with them?”

“No, Bob.”

“I’ll show you then.” Bob flipped his spear to have the blunt side facing the drunk man approaching him with bottle in hand. He then swiftly prodded at the man’s stomach with the spear’s shaft, pushing him away and making him lose breath.

The drunk man quickly retreated after having been defeated with this expert show of arms, though he apparently forgot his bottle on the ground. Bob took the bottle into his hand, realizing with a smile that it was still sealed with an unopened cork. “This looks like some good stuff.” He opened the bottle with his bare hands like an uncivilized barbarian and had a sip for taste-testing. Then he almost spat it back out due to how strong it was.

“That’s no fair, give me my share as well!” Billy received his own sip, then Bob another, until the bottle had reached its bottom and there was nothing else to drink. Boredom had made being blackout drunk seem very appealing to them.

It was not like anyone would dare infiltrate the castle of all places.

★ **FALLOFTHESLAVEHAREM** ★

66th of Summer 5859
Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

“Snore...”

It was morning.

“Zzz...”

Bob and Billy were still fast asleep.

“Yawn...” **CRACKLE!** “What the hell?!”

A burnt piece of wood had fallen right next to Billy. He jumped up, and turned around to see...
“The granary... Bob, the damn granary!”

“Hm? What are you screaming bloody murder?” Bob slowly opened his eyes, though he could barely see anything with how hammered he was. He turned his head to where Billy was pointing to see... “The granary!” Or, to give a more accurate description, he turned around to see not the granary, but a burnt patch of land and rubble in the place where the granary behind the walls once was. There was a smell of burnt bread in the air, possibly from the wheat which had turned into ash alongside the building.

“So... w-what do we do?” asked Billy. His hands were shaky, both from being hammered and from having doomed an entire city with said hammering.

Bob gave an answer to Billy by dashing away from the castle before anyone could come to see their cockup. Billy joined him in the dash, running as far away from the castle as possible.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

66th of Summer 5859

Some inconspicuous forest near Casamonu, Casamonu

Shinasi raised his arms up, praising the sun finally brightening him up. “Phew, I hate these tunnels. They’re dark, irritating, damp...”

The tunnel guides provided by Ayda had already gone back to the tunnels, leaving Shinasi alone with Ayomide whose ability to see in the dark had helped them greatly, and Kyauta who had helped them with being sneaky. He took in the fresh air, so unlike the oppressive air found in the underground tunnel system of Ayda. Fresh air, one of the only truly free things in this world, seemed most precious when he had been deprived of it for a measly couple minutes.

“Then, let’s get away from these tunnels as fast as we can.” Ayomide raised her crystal up and lit up the surroundings for her comrades.

Shinasi looked back at the exit of the tunnel, sighing. He was carrying an empty bottle. “Shame about the bottle of rectified spirits, the guards ended up drinking it all... I’m surprised they were able to wake up afterwards.”

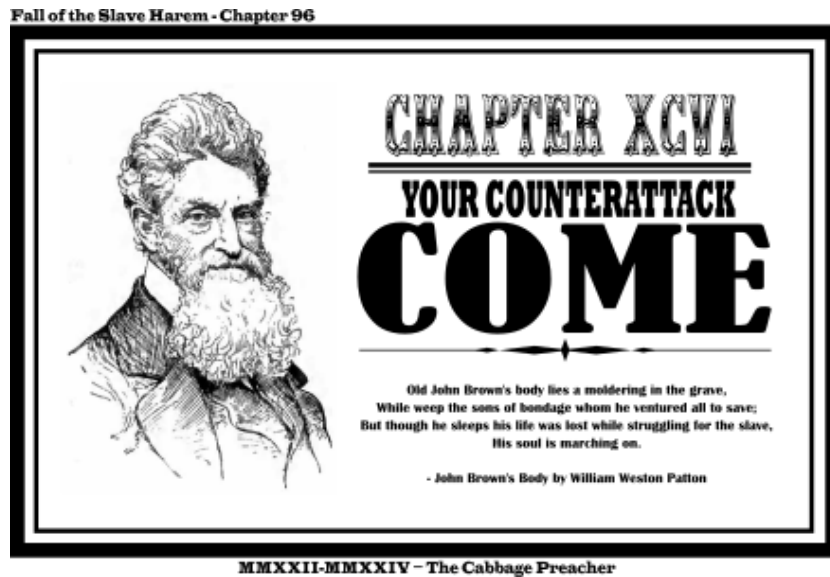
Kyauta pushed Shinasi forward towards the outside of the forest. “Are you really thinking about that right now?!”

“He did a good job Kyauta, don’t be too harsh on the man.” Ayomide took Shinasi by the hand to lead him. “Especially his drunken act. I was actually concerned for a second when I saw him limp like that...”

Kyauta shrugged. “Fine, whatever you say.”

Ayomide and co. made their way out of the forest, unaware of the fact that they had set fire to something more than the granary.

Chapter 99: Chapter XCVI – Your counterattack come.



67th of Summer 5859 Sir Korvus' Not-So-Humble Dwelling, Casamonu

Sir Corvus woke up, didn't brush his teeth because dental hygiene hadn't been invented yet, and then clapped his hands to call a servant to his bed for breakfast. He waited for a good second, and then he waited for a bad second, before finally realizing that nobody was coming. The young master got off his own hindside for once. It was certainly a struggle, and he made up his mind to whip the servants who had slacked off. Nearing the door, he heard some faint murmuring. A whole lot of it. Corvus opened the door to see a large congregation of servants, retainers, and other unmemorable personages of the castle arguing between each other.

"You tell him!"

"No, you tell him!"

"...people, he's right there."

The congregation immediately fell silent upon seeing their lord look at them with confusion. Corvus looked at them, they looked back at Corvus, and this would have gone on forever if not for Corvus opening his mouth. "What's going on here? Speak, or you'll all be hanging tomorrow!"

"S-sir!"

"Uhm..."

"Yeah... Nothing?"

Corvus could clearly see the congregation fidget and look at each other in anticipation. His birthday was a few months off, so this clearly couldn't be a birthday surprise. Nor could it be an assassination attempt of some sort considering nobody had tried to stab him yet. What was going on? "Just tell me what's going on!"

“Uhm...”

“Ahem...”

“So...”

Finally, a retainer with well-polished armor stepped forth. “Sir, the- the castle was infiltrated yesterday.

“And?” asked Corvus. He began pacing around while waiting for an answer with his brows furrowed deeply.

“And... Erm...”

“And?” asked Corvus once more. He had paced around to a window facing out towards the castle’s gate. There he saw a pile of ash where his lovely granary used to be. “...and.” He turned around to the congregation behind him as if he was waiting for them to confirm whether he hadn’t gone mad or not.

“...as you can see, sir.” concluded the well-polished retainer. “They burnt down the granary.”

“I can see that, you bloody fool!” Corvus’ plans about hanging someone for failing to serve him food had been thrown out the window now that excrement had hit the windmill. Now he wanted to hang someone for having doomed their defense. “Where are the fools who were guarding the gates yesterday?”

“We weren’t able to find them, sir. They apparently ran away yesterday.”

“The guards let the intruders burn the granary?!” To Corvus, it was obvious that the Demon King’s army was behind this. Who else would come in and bribe his guards to burn the granary down?

“Find those lousy guards and... and...” It was way too late. There was nobody who could unburn the granary, since no magician in Gemeinplatz had dared study into something as silly-sounding as “unburning magic”. “...you know what, we don’t have time for that! Everyone! Listen up!”

Silence fell upon the congregation in the room. The retainers of Corvus, those who knew at least a little bit about war, could feel the fact that their food stores being destroyed in a siege was no good. The rest of the servants could feel the fact that the retainers were feeling no good. Nobody felt good about a bunch of evil demon-lovers entering their castle.

“Now, let me say this clearly: We’ll be starving to death in a couple of days.” That much had been clear since the start, but clear mention of it by Corvus caused shoulders to be slumped and faces to be sullen. There was doom, gloom, and despair in the air. Doomsday had arrived, the one consistently preached by priests, and the people here were about to meet it head on. “They have us surrounded. There’s no way we can simply escape unnoticed or unscathed. We have been unable to contact anyone outside the walls for reinforcements, and none will come before we run out of food and eat each other. Therefore!” He pointed out the window, towards the burnt granary “We have no choice but to sally forth and sortie, or we’ll all be razed like this granary!”

“Being razed doesn’t sound good...”

“It definitely doesn’t.”

“Mhm.”

The people around Corvus weren't exactly motivated by their lord who had planned on looting the city and leaving in a similar fashion, but they couldn't help but agree on the fact that they didn't want to be the ones being razed.

“Then, if you agree that we should live standing than die kneeling, get everyone you can! We'll easily ride the savages down!”

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

68th of Summer 5859

Below the disintegrating walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Brown was pacing around the camp. His hair would have whitened from the stress if not for the fact that it hadn't done that way before he had landed on Gemeinplatz.

“Armageddon, young lady, this is our Armageddon.” The old man was followed by Ayomide, and around them were the thousand or so free soldiers. “Here we shall sever the wicked, and from our wounds the Lord shall let freedom flow.”

From the perspective of the League, defending against a sortie wasn't easy. The walls around Casamonu had two gates, and there was also one breach made by Ayomide right next to one of the gates, so there were three locations in total the defenders could sortie from. The two gates were in opposite directions to each other, which meant that the League had to practically divide their forces in two to anticipate the attack, which an attack would surely come if the defenders didn't plan on starving to death while doing nothing. One force was being led by Brown and Ayomide while Tubman and Shinasi attended to the other.

“Old man, look.” Ayomide pointed at the top of the wall “They don't have any men on the walls.”

“This means that they must have gathered everyone for an attack.” Brown stopped in middle of a group of troops. “This is good, they don't even have anyone checking the walls itself. Our little surprise won't be ruined.”

“Little surprise? I haven't heard of such a thing.”

Brown smiled. “You'll be hearing and seeing it soon, young lady. Providence provides to those who are patient.”

Ayomide shrugged, not wishing to dig further into the old man's antics for now. “I've been more than patient, I'd say.”

“You need to be more than more than patient then, young lady.” Such quips were the only thing left to do while waiting for the attack. Brown had never considered what Julius Caesar must have been doing to pass the time while waiting for the barbarians to attack. The poor fellow must have died from boredom.

Suddenly, a soldier from the frontline screamed “I think I see them!” Their thought turned out to be correct. Brown saw the thick iron gates of the walls slowly roll up to reveal a mass of troops.

On the other side of the gate, Sir Corvus II had one simple command: “Cut them down!”

On one side was the men of Casamonu, comprised of Corvus' retainers, the city's garrison, reinforced with armed citizens and somewhat-armed adventurers. Sir Corvus' personal retainers were very well armed, some having full steel plate armor combined with state-of-the-art culverins. These men, being of excellent noble and chivalrous breed, stayed back to let everyone else graciously take the brunt of the attack.

In front of the retainers were the city's garrison, who had diminished greatly in quality and quantity during the recent period of turmoil that Casamonu had found itself in. Still, they were all armed with excellently tailored gambesons, and nobody could deny that their helmets looked mighty shine and fine. The garrison was frontmost, with their shields raised up and spears raised forward to protect the troops behind them.

Sandwiched between the noble and the ignoble folk were the truly ignoble folk: a collection of armed citizenry and paid adventurers. Casamonu's citizens, like many other cities in the Empire, were obliged to defend the city in case of an emergency like a siege. Legally speaking, at least one adult in a household had to keep a weapon and a helmet ready, though the level of readiness was shaky due to the corners cut by the citizens looking to pinch pennies here and there.

Lastly were the adventurers, whose skills in defeating low level mobs was high, and their skills in defeating besieging armies was about to be tested.

On the other side were the men of the League. In terms of numbers, they were outnumbered about three-to-one. The fact that the army of Corvus had to trickle out the gate negated this a bit. Their equipment was a whole lot more standardized compared to Corvus': a copper helmet/bowl, a copper spear, a gambeson, and a huge shield. They paled in comparison compared to Corvus' fine retainers. What they lacked in equipment however...

"Hold the line! Keep those shields up! Do not move an inch!"

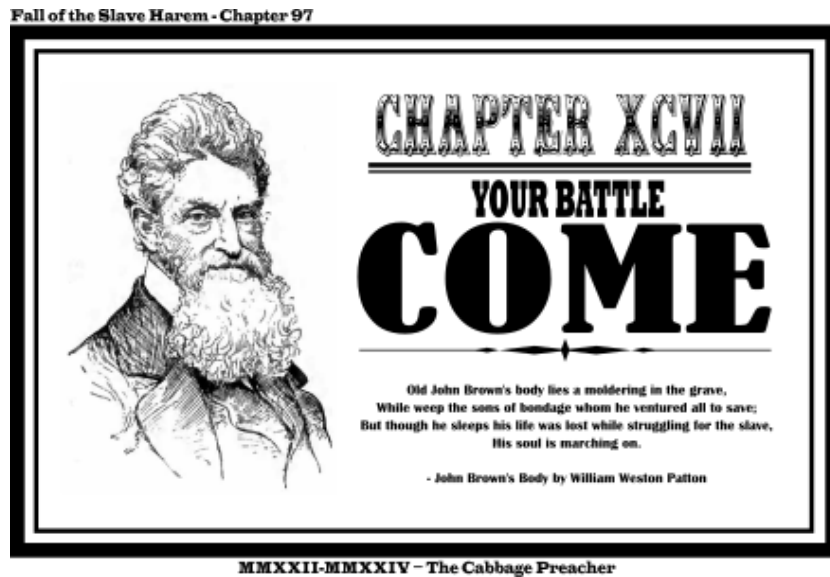
...they made up in discipline and training. The League moved as if it was one giant body unlike the cacophony of Corvus' army. Sure, there were some kinks here and there, but the men of the League had quickly and efficiently formed a square before they had even met the enemy. No matter how much Corvus' retainers circled, they wouldn't be able to find an opening to charge in with their horses.

"Behave yourselves, do not charge yet! Wait for the adventurers to wear the enemy down."

Corvus wasn't an idiot however, so he kept his retainers back to let the lowly infantry smash against the square and create an opening. The retainers stayed back, the infantry began their charge, and one crossbowman fired the first bolt of the battle towards the square.

The Battle of Casamonu had begun.

Chapter 100: Chapter XCVII – Your battle come.



MMXXII-MMXXIV – The Cabbage Preacher

68th of Summer 5859

Below the disintegrated walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Casamonu: a grand ancient city, established several millennia before the Empire of Gemeinplatz had ever been born. The city stands above all the Casamonus before it, so much rubble had built up over the years that the city had found itself on a hill. For the last week, city's walls had been bombarded by a canon which had caused a breach. Such an important city required excellent protection from those protecting it, and excellent protection required excellent soldiers.

Unfortunately, experienced guards require money. Money that Sir Corvus definitely couldn't afford to spare for some men to stand around all day waiting for an attack from the sieging forces outside.

"So, what're you doing this weekend?" asked Billy (whole real name continued to be Bilaleddin), who had escaped being caught and gotten a place in the sortie. Thankfully, his gambeson being newly fixed was about to become really useful.

"...don't you have anything else to talk about? We're heading to battle, for my granny's sake!" replied Bob (who real name had been Boron until he had gone to court last week and legally changed his name to be Bob, and then he had illegally changed his name to Boraks while he had been under hiding), who too had survived again and found himself stuck with the idiot right next to him again. He had to sell his tabard to cover lodging costs during his stint in hiding, and now he looked like any ordinary soldier amongst the mob of soldiers.

Billy sighed and looked forward toward the ranks of fugitive slaves in formation. They had gotten close enough to them to see eye-to-eye, though the eyes of Billy were more focused on the spears that the fugitives held. They stood like a human porcupine, which definitely wasn't a pleasant sight, especially when one was potentially about to be on the sharp end of said porcupine.

The two sides met... or, they were about to meet, but Billy saw that the men around him slowed down right before they were about to be impaled. Billy and Bob stopped too as they wanted to continue being alive. They saw javelins, bolts and arrows whizz dangerously close as both sides

exchanged fire without entering melee. Billy turned around to see if he could run away, but the crowd of soldiers behind him was too great. He was being pushed forward by the people behind him, and he was pushing the people in front of him. Eventually the push proved too great, and the brave souls in front of Billy were forced into contact. Those with shorter weapons crouched under the spears in order to close the distance, while those with longer weapons began clashing spears at a more respectable distance.

Billy and Bob joined their spears in the clash, though they were unable to do much in the chaos as their spears were practically lost in the forest of wooden shafts. They still had hold of their own spears, sure, but they were unable to control their weapons as the forest of spears moved seemingly randomly. It was chaos distilled to its purest and densest form.



Slowly, Bob saw holes forming in the shield wall of the fugitives. A few men had been downed thanks to the bold adventurers (who were looking to earn some extra pay by being in the front) crawling under many a spear. The fugitives who fell found themselves crushed either by enemies or friends trying to reposition themselves. The same was true of the men of Casamonu, who either went forward or went downward to never come up again. Neither Billy or Bob could tell who was winning and who was losing.

The fugitives were unable to reinforce their front properly however, and Billy had found himself being pushed forward towards a portion of the wall which had been left without spears. He was so close to an enemy soldier that he could feel them breathe on his neck. Spears became unwieldy at such close range, so both men dropped their weapons and began wrestling each other. Everyone around them was busy with the battle, so there wasn't much to bother them in their fight to the death. Billy punched the fugitive right in the face. He immediately drew his fist back when the

fugitive responded by biting his arm while twisting it. The fugitive followed up with a kick to Billy's gut, and then a headbutt that threw him back and landed him on his backside.

With his head spinning like a windmill on a stormy day, Billy retreated back to the relative safety of Corvus' men. His comrades had done the same as well, the fighting winding down as both sides retreated to rest with no man's land in between them. Billy had felt hours pass by when, in actuality, only a couple minutes of fighting had occurred before everyone had been too tired to fight on. He felt like he had run an intense marathon, and it made sense: fighting was physically intense, especially when it was a fight where both sides were trying to dearly hold on to their lives. In the middle, where the no man's land was, were the poor souls who had failed in holding on to life. Worse than a graveyard the scene was, with the bodies just lying there exposed with no tombstone or any sort respect for the dead.

Billy looked away from the open-air graveyard. Corpses weren't the most pleasant of things to look at. He'd have noticed Bob amongst those in the pile of corpses if he did, but now was not the time for noticing such things. Projectiles were still flying to-and-fro. One man next to Billy collapsed after being hit right in the throat by a javelin.

He wondered how things were looking from the other side of the battle...

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

68th of Summer 5859

Below the disintegrated walls of Casamonu but a bit further, Casamonu

"Hold, hold you-" shouted Ayomide to the crowd who were too busy to listen to her. All that training, all that drill, and it had gained them what? A few more minutes before the men of the League had begun slowly falling back from the enemy army? She watched as the copper spears of her comrades struggled to penetrate through simple gambeson. What'd happen when the more heavily armored retainers came to the frontline, would they not be able to penetrate their armor at all? Ayomide had done her best by casting wind there and then to make a few enemies trip, but she herself wasn't going to be able to turn the tide of battle. The old man, despite having made a remarkable show with the cultivator, had seemingly exhausted all his built-up power all in that one fight. He wasn't going to be of much use either, unless he could pray hard enough to summon a miracle or something.

Everything seemed to become silent for a moment, even if it was nothing but silent. Ayomide could see chains bind her again as the right flank of the shield wall completely broke off. She turned her head around to see that the flank had met the brunt of a cavalry charge by Corvus' retainers. "Turn around, there's cavalry to your right!" she shouted, and the few men who heard her tried their best to reform their ranks to face the charging cavalry. The horses stopped right before the spears, and the cavalrymen turned around to retreat after unloading a volley of fire at the men who had stopped them. Then came the enemy infantrymen who, looking to take advantage of the distracted men of the League, had already surrounded the men who had turned around to meet the charge.

Ayomide looked around her, seeing John Brown in the distance to her left. He was keeping his cool, calmly commanding men in the back to march forward to fill the broken ranks. Soon the right flank was built up again as the fresh and energetic reserves pushed back the tired enemy. This local retreat prompted a general retreat as both sides silently agreed on a brief truce to take a breather. Such brief, impromptu truces in mass combat were common in Gemeinplatz, or for any sort of

melee battle everywhere for that matter. Ayomide ran to the left to meet up with Brown during this brief respite.

The old man welcomed Ayomide as she ran towards him. “Don’t run, young lady. You need to conserve your energy for the rest of the day.”

“Old man, we...” she broadly gestured at where the right flank had collapsed.

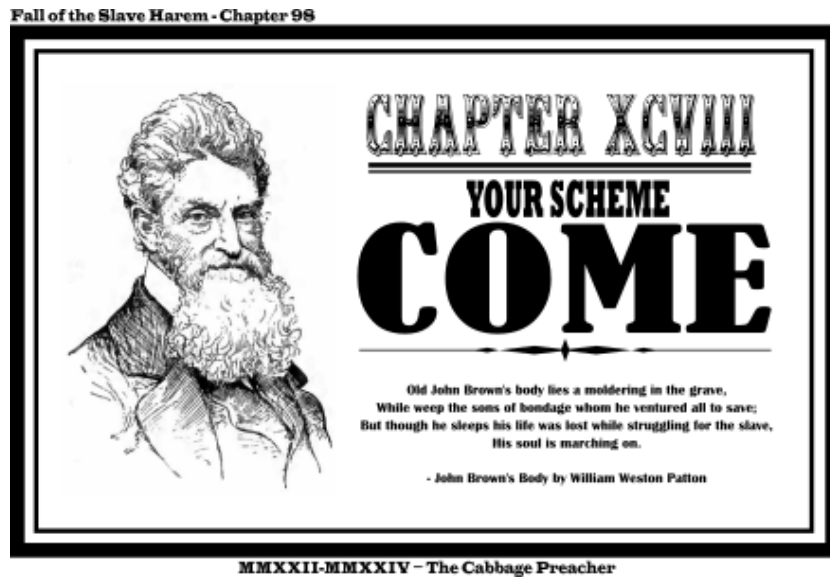
Brown broadly gestured to where the men from the flank had retreated to, which was right next to him. “Hm? We’ve reinforced that flank, haven’t we? It’s normal to have men retreat in battle, especially after such a devastating cavalry charge. What’s important is that we don’t break completely, and that they return to battle when they are ready.” He looked at the enemy side. “Things might look bad here, young lady, but I can assure you that the enemy isn’t feeling any better than us. Keep faith, and we’ll be victorious. Especially as...” The old man’s gaze went up to the walls. “I think they’ve arrived.”

“What has arrived?” Ayomide looked up the wall as well. The walls were deserted, without soldiers, except for two dark figures in the distance. She could swear that there had been at least a skeleton crew of enemy soldiers there before. The dark figures threw some burning bags down towards the enemy soldiers and-

BOOM!

Before Ayomide could even reorient herself from the explosion, Brown shouted “Now is the time, charge!”

Chapter 101: Chapter XCVIII – Your scheme come.



68th of Summer 5859

Right next to the disintegrated walls of Casamonu, Casamonu

Billy thought that this must be hell, or more accurately, he had found himself in a hellish otherworld. He had heard an explosion right behind him, a severed hand had slapped him on his back, and now the fugitive slaves were running towards him while shouting “Liberty or death!” Now he could hear screaming behind, right, left, and in front of him. It seemed that the men of Corvus were in rout and running towards the walls, and Billy joined them in their wild dash. His comrades on the frontlines were immediately killed in the charge, lacking support after everyone behind them had routed, and Billy could feel that there was a fugitive right behind him. He ran fast, faster, and as fast as he could, weaving through the disorganized crowd trying to retreat back to the safety of the city’s walls.

Corvus’ men had retreated back to the gate of the city, forming a wall of men blocking off the entrance. They had lost many soldiers, but the gate was narrow and they were ready to defend it if the fugitives tried to push their assault further. Sir Corvus himself was at the back of the line, doing his best to regroup the routed men for another push.

“Look men, they are a bunch of savages, holding crude weapons tipped with copper. If we lose here, then our progeny will never forgive us for being cowards. They can’t pierce our armor, they can’t pierce our will, and with another cavalry charge they’ll be gone with the wind. Don’t be startled by some cheap explosive darkskin trick!” Truth be told, none of Sir Corvus’ retainers had died in the charge. Their steel armor was simply too tough to be pierced by copper, and they were professional soldiers armed with experience. With proper infantry support, Corvus was sure that the fugitives would break soon enough after realizing that defeating his cavalry was a futile endeavor.

Despite Corvus’ speech, the men were unwilling to charge. It was the same for Brown’s men too – they were tired after having ran after the enemy. Both sides continued trading projectiles at a safe range, looking to see who would gather energy first to commit to entering combat again. Corvus knew that the city would begin having food shortages, and that his men wouldn’t be able to fight in

peak condition like this again if they were routed again. Brown on the other hand wanted to capture Casamonu before it began starving and the people inside needlessly suffered, not to mention the fact that he wanted to take a break with military campaigning to establish a non-provisionary government as soon as possible.

Suddenly, an idea popped up in Ayomide's head. She poked Brown. "Old man, could you delay the charge for a bit? I'll bring something real quick."

Brown nodded. "Go a bit forward, very slowly, don't actually charge them!" He vaguely got what Ayomide wanted to do, so he feigned a charge to make the enemy go on the defensive. Corvus' men packed themselves close together to anticipate the coming charge. "Alright, very slowly now. Act like you're hesitating." It took several minutes, and the armies were far away from making melee contact.

Meanwhile, Ayomide had gathered a few of her men to help her. She was coming back on a horse that had a cart attached to it. The cart had an item which had been covered up by cloth. "Open the way, heavy load coming through!" She parked the cart near the frontlines, though the enemy soldiers were too busy watching her "charging" comrades to give any notice to her. She uncovered the cloth, revealing the cannon and shrapnel-packed cannonballs which they had used for the siege. "Rabanowicz isn't here, but I think we can make this shot without her. Turn the canon around towards 'em!" Her men pushed the canon on the cart to face the enemy. With the extra height provided by the cart, Ayomide could clearly see the enemy despite standing behind her allied comrades. A few of the enemy soldiers had noticed her, and she saw them pointing towards the canon. It was a bit too late however, as Ayomide and her men loaded the cannonball.

The first cannonball tore through the middle of the packed crowd of defenders. Ayomide hadn't managed to time the fuse without Rabanowicz, so the ball lodged itself on to the earth which happened to extinguish the fuse. However, a heavy clay ball launched from relatively close range was still fast enough to cause instant death and injury to the men it had made contact with. The second cannonball landed right as the defenders had understood what was happening and begun breaking their ranks in a rout. After a few seconds in the earth, the second cannonball's fuse went off.

BOOM!

Countless shrapnel flew around, injuring and killing many of Corvus' men. The explosion itself knocked many of them out, and there no longer was a defensive line to speak of. Brown shouted "One last charge, let's make sure they never return again!", and the men of the League began their charge for the gates. There were none of Corvus' men left on the wall to close the gates, and so the League poured into Casamonu proper.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

68th of Summer 5859

Below the other gate of Casamonu, Casamonu

"Yawn..." Shinasi had been cooking under the scorching summer sun, and for what? It seemed that the enemy had decided not attack through this gate considering he hadn't seen any enemy soldiers for a long while. The men had gotten tired of waiting as well, and most of them were sitting on the ground, chatting between themselves.

It felt weird to complain about there being peace and no battle, but Shinasi felt himself complaining about just that. He contemplated whether or not his men should move to the other gate to help their comrades, but Tubman had strictly ordered Shinasi to stay put and stick with the plan. Stuck he was, stuck without being able to help Ayomide... Truth be told, Shinasi was pacing around, worrying whether she was doing fine on the other side. At least he would have preferred to die by her side if they were going to be defeated.

Suddenly, a jolt. The gate began opening, going up and up. The men got up from their hindsides and prepared for battle. This was it. Fate had called upon them, to fight for liberty or for death. Frustration, for having waited for so long, swelled up in their chest. They were ready to charge and tear the enemy to shreds even if Tubman didn't order them to.

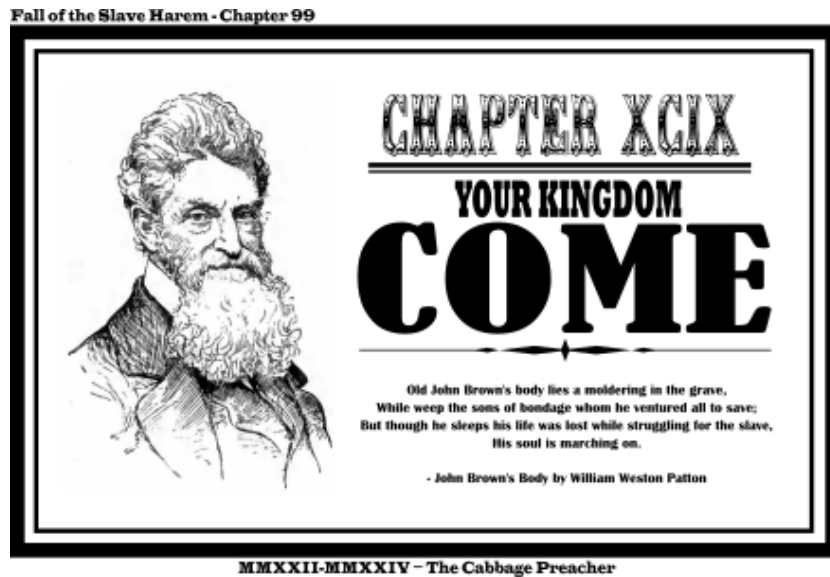
The gate opened, and on the other side were... "The captain? Ayomide?" ...fellow soldiers of the League.

Brown and co. rode up to meet their comrades-in-arms, and they were met with cheers. However, Brown seemed to be in way less of a jovial mood. He quickly reported to Tubman and co. "We have taken the gates and the walls, but the defenders are still fighting in the streets, and most of them have locked themselves in the castle. The siege is far from over, so save your celebrations for later if you could. We won't have control of this city without having control of the castle up on that hill, so we rushed over here to reunite with you and take the castle together. Me and Ayomide's men are tired from the battle, so we'll need your help." Tubman's and Shinasi's men weren't too happy with the fact that they'd have to attack a castle, but they were relieved to hear that their comrades had won the battle.

Without being given a chance to cheer for their victory, the men of the League marched back into the city.

They were eager to write the last chapter of Sir Corvus' story.

Chapter 102: Chapter XCIX – Your kingdom come.



68th of Summer 5859 Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

Sir Corvus found himself standing on the ramparts of a wall. These were not the wide, ever-encompassing walls that he was used to. These were shorter, thinner, and much older than the walls of Casamonu. He knew not how old this castle was, just that it was pretty old, and whether or not it would stand up to a cannon. "Who am I kidding?" he muttered to himself. *Of course, it won't.* He turned around and looked towards a door leading inside the castle. Corvus could hear a hymn accompanied by a crowd. Priests from the local temple had run inside the castle for protection, and now they were holding service just before the battle. To him, it seemed like a scene right from fiery gospels writ in burnished rows of steel.

"The Demon King is here, and all we can do is stand and watch." Corvus bowed his head. Only if he had taken his loot and escaped! He'd at least have had a year or two of luxury before the demonic legions took over Gemeinplatz. Now, from atop the hill where the castle stood, he could see a line of fugitives march up and up towards his holdout. Still, he had hope. His men were stationed inside a castle after all. Sure, they could blow open the walls, but the fugitives would have to fight through the castle's tight corridors if they wanted a quick victory. Corvus only needed a brief respite for his heavily armored retainers to charge out of the castle and blow the fugitives back to where they came from.

Things would be fine.

Corvus would have to calm down now and, after this was all over, he'd piss off to the capital and never return to these accursed borderlands ever again. He made his way into the castle to avoid being shot by a stray javelin. The indoors were truly crowded, with soldiers and other persons of various levels of importance squeezing between each other while navigating the tight corridors of the old castle. The air was oppressive, both from the tight and crowded space and from the feeling of impending doom. It was awfully silent despite so many people being so close together. Even the noblemen had stopped admonishing the occasional person accidentally stepping on and dirtying

their shoes. Facing death, all had become equal as they were in the eyes of the grim reaper. Corvus squeezed through, the sounds of the hymn becoming louder as he got closer and closer to the center of the castle.

*Ye who accompany us, day and night
Deliver us from evil, o' Divine
We bow before thine boundless magnificence
Ye who is most merciful and kind*

For now, Corvus had nothing to do but wait for the enemy to attack. The men garrisoning the castle would have to deal with it. There was no harm in joining the sermon and praying for a good place in the afterlife if things were to go south. His dining hall had been turned into an impromptu prayer hall, though now was definitely not the time to shout at the priests for having done that without asking him. Corvus sat on the ground, where all the common and uncommon people also were. It was as if some divine power had constructed everything, the siege, the Demon Lord, all of it, just to humble him in this exact moment.

*With thine infinite will and wisdom
Ye made all that is above
Below we pray to visit
Thine kingdom to come*

Suddenly, an explosion rang out above Corvus' head. It was outside the walls of the castle, but the explosion was so loud that it felt like Corvus had been bashed on the head. Dust fell from the ceiling, and a few stray bricks fell from the ceiling. One particularly large one landed right next to Corvus, almost killing him there and then. He screamed and jumped away from the brick which reminded him of his mortality. The castle was relatively old, it hadn't been built with cannons in mind, and his predecessors had only renovated its insides to look fashionable. Castle Casamonu had been the core of Casamonu after all, as the city had been rebuilt around it after it had been burnt down again in time immemorial. Now Corvus was in time memorable, and the castle had proved to be too weak. He got up and grabbed the first soldierly-looking bloke he could find "Get the- get the officers to gather the men, we have to mount an offense to defeat them!"

The nameless soldier bowed and then ran to get his officer. Corvus, ever curious, ran to the walls to see how many were sieging them down. There must not have been much fugitives left, and he remembered that the force he fought outside wasn't too large. Unless they had somehow pulled out some reserves in the last hour, Corvus still had a chance to win.

There was one slight problem.

"...am I seeing doubles, or are there a whole lot more men down there?"

Corvus' vision was perfectly clear.

The League, with their forces gathered from the second gate, had practically doubled their manpower with fresh troops eager to fight. At least they had stopped firing. There was an old man, known to some as Captain John Brown, waving a white flag towards his enemy. "To whoever is responsible for the command of this city, I'd like to parlay with you!" His voice was carried by the wind magic of Ayomide, which allowed him to be heard from far away.

Sir Corvus didn't have the convenience of a catgirl wizard though. "Get me a white cloth!" Soon, he was waving a white tablecloth in response. "We accept your offer" he replied to buy some time

while his men got ready to attack. The cannon-fire had stopped, replaced by anticipant silence.

“I’d like to read an excerpt from our constitution, the law that our League abides by.” Brown cleared his throat and read the eighth article of the provisional constitution:

Article VIII: No person, after having surrendered himself or herself a prisoner, and who shall properly demean himself or herself as such, to any officer or private connected with this organization, shall afterward be put to death, or be subject to any corporeal punishment, without first having had the benefit of a fair and impartial trial; nor shall any prisoner be treated with any kind of cruelty, disrespect, insult, or needless severity; but it shall be the duty of all persons, male and female, connected herewith, at all times and under all circumstances, to treat all such prisoners with every degree of respect and kindness that the nature of the circumstances will admit of, and to insist on a like course of conduct from all others.

“I can see, from the deserted streets, that many citizens have escaped into your castle. If you surrender now, we’ll treat you and your citizenry according to the aforementioned laws. If you do not surrender and make us bombard your castle, you’ll be responsible for the deaths of the many who reside within. So, for the sake of yourself and others in the castle, I ask you to raise the white flag and surrender your weapons!”

Men atop the castle walls looked at each other and then to their lord. Sir Corvus looked back at the anticipant crowd. “What, do you think we’re going to surrender to a bunch of savages? We-we’ll charge at them, and run them down!” The crowd’s lack of enthusiasm gave him a sufficient answer.

“Listen!” Brown continued “We know that it is hard to trust our word, for malignant forces have made you believe that we are here to do evil. Let me say: we have the Hero on our side.” His declaration of having a Hero didn’t exactly do much when he could easily be making it up. “... ladies and gentlemen, let me tell you an unpleasant truth: We either demolish this castle with you in it, which definitely would result in your death, or you surrender and take a chance at life. I ask you: which scenario has a higher chance of you making it out of here?”

Men atop the castle walls looked at each other and to their lord again. Sir Corvus was getting sick of the crowd. “Didn’t you hear me?!” He shouted down at Brown. “We do not negotiate with savage darkskins and servants of the Demon Lord! All of us will die here if we have to!” Sir Corvus, if he was to die, at least wanted to make an example so his bravery and loyalty could be remembered. Even the littlest of prestige, the tiniest crumb, that was worth the countless lives sheltering in the castle. To die standing up with a sword in hand, that was the noble creed.

“Are you sure? We will begin bombardment immediately if you are to not surrender. This is your last chance.” replied Brown.

“Of course, no-” Before Sir Corvus could reply negatively to Brown, the crowd around him began making noise to drown him out.

“Sir, we have been defeated anyways!”

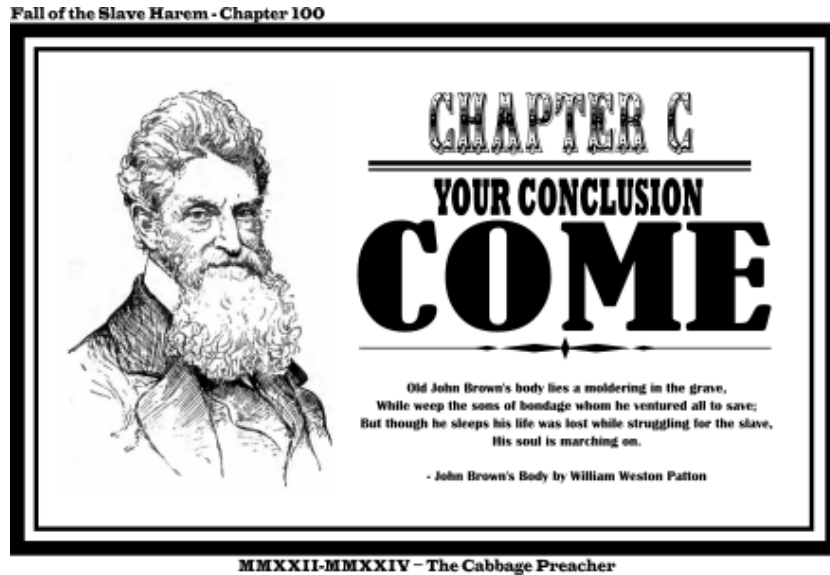
“Sir, just accept an honorable surrender!”

“Sir, just give us a chance to not die!”

Sir Corvus roared back to shut the men up. “You! Don’t you all have weapons, or at least hands to swing back at the enemy? Why are you here, instead of mounting a counter-attack, do you stand here like cowards! I’ll reject the offer; you knaves go down and fight those savages!” He was about to tell Brown to piss off when one of the soldiers next to him jumped to grab him. The crowd followed too, trying to silence Sir Corvus. With so many people on the tight ramparts trying to apprehend him, Corvus was pushed to and fro.

Suddenly, Corvus lost his balance. The wave of people behind him pushed him off the rampart. Gravity did the rest as the once high and mighty Sir Corvus found himself speeding head-first into another world.

Chapter 103: Chapter C – Your conclusion come.



68th of Summer 5859
Right below Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

There was a solemn procession going on which Casamonu hadn't seen the likes of in its long history.

*Ye who accompany us, day and night
Deliver us from evil, o' Divine
We bow before thine boundless magnificence
Ye who is most merciful and kind*

As the gates of the castle creaked open, the people hiding inside Casamonu Castle began their march out. It was a slow march of defeat, their heads held low, and their eyes staying away from the dregs who had defeated them. Frontmost were priests accompanying an officer who was acting in the late Sir Corvus' stead, behind them were soldiers who were carrying white banners, and surrounded by these soldiers were the citizens of the town who had hidden in the castle. They were all silent save for the priests chanting their hymn. Anyone who carried arms dropped it to the ground as they exited, making quite the impressive pile of weaponry around the castle gate.

"That's quite the impressive performance. It's as if everyone here was trained on how to surrender." commented Brown from afar. He and the captains of the League were standing at the end of a corridor formed by the soldiers of the League.

"It's just how we do it here, captain. The noblemen get instructed extensively on how to conduct effective warfare and surrender courteously when they fail." replied Vaiz, who was the master of ceremonies for the League in this instance of surrender. "Get ready to receive the delegation, I think they're marching forward to surrender to you since you're the commander-in-chief."

The procession of unarmed soldiers stopped in front of Brown and co. The officer in charge of the surrender asked "Are you the chief commander of these fugitives?"

“Yes, for the time being I am.” replied Brown.

The officer paused, unsure whether to continue speaking or go on with the surrender. “I... May we know who exactly we are surrendering to?”

“The League of Gileadites.”

“No, your name.”

“My name is Isaac... no, I don’t really need to use a nickname anymore, my name is John Brown. But it truly matters not who I am, for I am just a provisionary elected representative of the people behind me. Worry not about the mortal old man standing right before you, worry about the immortal ideals of liberty standing above and beyond you, sir. I will surely die, yet I doubt that liberty will die unless you are to slaughter humanity itself.”

The officer shuddered, though that shudder might have been due to the fact that Brown was taller and much more physically intimidating than him. He thought it surprising to hear such grand words from a commander of savages. “Understood, sir.” The officer cleared his throat, reciting the following lines in a robotic manner “You have fought fairly and achieved victory over us.” The next part however, was genuine and filled with dread “Please have mercy on us as the Divine commands.” He knelt down and extended a key towards Brown, one symbolizing the castle and Casamonu.

“Excuse me, but I’m not authorized to accept your surrender.” Brown stepped aside to let Ayomide take the stage. “She blew open the walls to the city, so I think Captain Ayomide is the one who deserves to take it.”

“Wait, that darkskin?” The officer stopped kneeling down in surprise. “S-Sir, I can surrender to you just fine.”

“You’re surrendering to all the fine folk here. Does it matter who you give the key to?” Brown’s hand slipped slightly towards his broadsword (one he had taken from the late Watanabe Generico). “If you do not wish to surrender, then state it clearly so that we can act accordingly.”

“Uhm...” The officer, and the people behind him, trembled for a split second. He eventually caved-in after a long minute of deliberation and knelt down in front of the revolutionary catgirls wizard. Surrendering to a darkskin demi-human, and a woman at that, was quite the humiliating prospect for a noble officer. “Please... have mur- mear- mercy on us as t-the Divine commands.”

“I’ll consider having some.” replied Ayomide. She wouldn’t have had any mercy if not for the old man cautioning her about the fact that murdering people willy-nilly wasn’t going to help anyone (something about murder not being okay). The revolutionary catgirl wizard, once holed up in an insignificant maid café in Azdavay, was now holding the keys to the city of Casamonu.

After Ayomide took the key, the surrender ceremony continued on with the soldiers from the castle handing Sir Corvus’ personal banner to the soldiers of the League. The minor noble officers and troops also handed their banners as well. Soon the League was armed with a whole assortment of wildly colored banners that were soon to mean nothing, for the eyes of the Lord grew tired of having to watch all those weird colors flaunting their status around.

“Now then” began Brown “The regular city folk among you is free to leave. To the noblemen and other wealthy folk: effective from this moment onwards, all of your slaves and indentured servants

are free. You are not free to leave the castle until we have held court for each one of you, and your former slaves and servants shall act as witnesses.”

This caused quite the shock among the crowd, with audible gasps and curses flying around. A fight would have broken out if not for the fact that all of their weapons had been taken away a few minutes ago. A voice cried out “You are a lunatic! A demon! What sort of nonsense are you spouting?”

“It is not nonsense. Didn’t you hear the constitution before you accepted surrender? We are to have a fair and impartial trial, and I think those who have served you for years will make for perfect witnesses.” Brown paused for dramatic effect and cleared his throat “Or do you not believe that you have treated your slaves fairly? Are you worried of what’ll happen if they speak up?”

“Please, have mercy! The darkskins are savages without any concept of reason – they’ll just blame us for no real reason!” shouted another person.

“Hey, I’m civilized enough to see that what you are saying is hogwash.” replied Ayomide, and her comrades joined with similar retorts. “Uncivilized are you who put people in chains and pretend to be doing good to them. My patience for your nonsense is wearing thin!”

“We’ll hear your arguments in court, gentlemen.” With this, the League began apprehending the noble men and women of Casamonu. To the onlooking citizens this was a surreal scene. First the men of fair skin had been defeated by those fugitives, then the men of noble blood had surrendered to those who lacked even surnames, and finally the men of high rank were being taken away by a bunch of former slaves. It was a total inversion of social order, one so shocking that it seemed like the end times had truly come. There was nothing to do but watch with their mouths agape, while some had given up on making reason of this mess to return to their homes and go about their day like usual.

Today, on 68th Summer 5859, Casamonu officially fell out of Imperial jurisdiction.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

68th of Summer 5859
Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

Night was falling onto Gemeinplatz, and Casamonu was unusually quiet. Not that it was much lively normally at night: an absence of convenient lighting options (like electricity) meant that life in Gemeinplatz came to a halt by nighttime. However, a curfew declared right after the surrender had meant that there truly was no one out on the streets during this night.

Ayomide was enjoying the brief time of rest before things were to fully kick into gear tomorrow. She was sitting in the former office of Casamonu’s castellan, enjoying the soft seat cushioning her hindsides which had been constantly aching on the long march here. “Life would be so good if not for the gits bothering us...” she thought out loud.

“Work hard to get them off your tail then, young lady.” replied Brown, to whom “taking a break” was a foreign concept. He was already busying himself with going through the records of the former counts of Casamonu to see if there was anything useful. “We haven’t done anything yet. This is the beginning of the beginning at best.”

“O’ old man, will you ever be fully satisfied?”

“Not until I meet the Lord in person, no, and I pray that I’ll be able to meet the Heavenly Father in his chambers without any regrets on my part.”

Ayomide chuckled. “You sure are hard to please.”

“Staying away from greed and being content is a virtue, young lady, but that doesn’t mean one shouldn’t be content if things are not well.”

“Yeah yeah, I get it...”

“That is not to say that I am displeased – I think you all have done excellent work. I’m just cautioning against thinking that we have won and becoming idle while we have an entire Empire to face.” Brown picked up the candle he had brought to his desk for reading. “I’ll be heading to sleep now, there isn’t much use in my going through these records when I can’t read the writing in the first place.”

“I’ll be waiting for Shinasi here. I can make my own light if I need to find my way if need be.”

Brown smiled, though that was barely visible from the dim candlelight. “I tend to forget. We didn’t have people capable of summoning light whenever they wanted back where I came from.”

“Sounds like a boring place to be.”

“I pray that we can make Gemeinplatz into a boring place to live as well.” Brown opened the door. “Good night, young lady.”

“I too hope the future will be boring. Good night, old man.”

Brown left with the candle, and the room was dark once more. Not that it mattered for Ayomide, her eyes saw just as well in the dark. She yawned. “Guess I’ll close my eyes and take a nap until Shinasi comes back...”

Tomorrow, a very different day was about to dawn on Casamonu.

Chapter 104: Epilogue I – But his soul is marching on.

The next chapters of the
JOHN BROWN ISEKAI
WERE BROUGHT TO YOU BY THESE FINE FOLKS OVER FROM MY **PATREON**

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May their efforts to advance the cause of the John Brown Isekai be never forgotten.

(The next chapters of the John Brown Isekai were brought to you by the fine folks over from my Patreon:

Brassican Preachers: *Joseph Dixon, Mjkoo, Da Fuk, cuisinart8, babytroll, John Brown, Dinomannick, HarryLime, The Less-Than-Good Hunter, Kira-Lil, 3411 44, Heiskan, Matthew O'Donnell, Riok Ollivier Ulfsson, Kermit, M.L. Smith, Dan Antseliovich*

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May their efforts to advance the cause of the John Brown Isekai be never forgotten.)

I John Brown am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty, land: will never be purged away; but with Blood. I had as I now think: vainly flattered myself that without very much bloodshed; it might be done.

- John Brown, 2nd of December 1859, last letter before his execution.

2nd of December, 1859 11:50 AM

Charles Town, Virginia

Old John Brown's body was not yet moldering in the grave. He was still hanging; he had been hanging for the last thirty minutes. A group of doctors had climbed onto the scaffold with the sheriff's permission, and they were examining the dead (?) old man closely. He seemed to be at peace, quite unlike a man who had just been brutally suffocated, and some of the doctors could swear that they saw a slight smirk on Brown's face even if they couldn't see his face due to it being under a hood used for the hanging.

"...should we just let him down?" said one doctor. "He must be dead. No man can survive after being strangled for thirty minutes." Nobody in the audience, and there was quite the vast audience of Charles Town citizens and soldiers, objected so he cut him loose from the noose. Brown's limp body fell on to the scaffold with a loud thud. The doctor rolled Brown face-up and put his hand on the old man's chest. His heart wasn't beating. "No heartbeat."

The crowd around the gallows breathed a sigh of relief. There was general revelry upon hearing the impromptu coroner's report. Some kept from, as good Christians should, cheering the death of a man no matter how despised he was seemed indecent. Spectators rushed to the gallows to preserve mementos of this occasion: some took locks of Brown's hair, some cut up pieces from the gallows and distributed it among themselves. It was as if human decency had left the town and men had been turned into savages.

When the crowd had enough of plucking the old man, the doctors carried his body back to the jail to officially declare him dead and sign his death certificate. Another doctor, a more impatient type, quickly took off the hood from Brown to see that the old man's face was somehow intact. There were no usual signs of asphyxiation: his eyes were where they should be, his skin still had a healthy color, and no fluid had come out of his mouth or nose. "Jesus Christ... This man doesn't look dead to me."

"His heart isn't beating; I think that proves he isn't living." shouted another doctor in the room.

"...I'm not sure." replied another. "This man is like a demon in human skin."

"God forbid, let's hope we aren't dealing with one. If we are, then he is like the king of demons with how despicable he is." continued yet another doctor.

A doctor took out a saw. "I think the only way we can be sure is through decapitation."

Another had a more civilized idea. “Let’s get some strychnine instead, that’ll be cleaner.” A few more ideas floated around the room on how to make sure Brown stayed dead.

The doctor from before who had cut Brown off from the gallows interjected “Stop, let’s take a pause. He has hanged for thirty minutes, and I hope I don’t need to remind you that we are dealing with a mortal man. Nobody can survive hanging for half an hour.”

“Let’s just give the body some time then. His body will become stiff if he’s dead. If it doesn’t, then we can consider decapitation.” replied a more reasonable fellow. He then looked at his pocket watch and declared “Oh, look at the time. Let’s give him some time to mold while we have lunch.”

“Good idea. Taters, anyone?”

“I’ll get the beer.”

“...I’ll stay here to make sure he doesn’t run off.”

After three hours, and then another half an hour, old John Brown’s mortality was finally confirmed when he hadn’t began marching on and out of the jail with his body firmly in rigor mortis. His death certificate was signed by the doctors, who went back to their homes content that they had done a good job making sure that John Brown wasn’t marching on.

★ **FALL OF THE SLAVE HAREM** ★

69th of Summer 5859
Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

Today was a beautiful day pretty different from any other.

The summer was slowly coming to an end in Northern Gemeinplatz as colder winds were making their way to the region. General Winter would make his visit soon, and the birds were preparing to make their hasty retreat when it began its invasion once more.

In the midst of this was one 19th century radical abolitionist known as John Brown, who had a pretty good idea where he was. The scenery around him was too ordinary to be Heaven, too unscorched to be Hell. It was Gemeinplatz, an ordinary land not unlike his home.

Brown woke up like he had done so for the last 60 years. He was staying in one of the rooms reserved for the servants of the castle. There were fancier rooms for the family of the nobles who’d stay in the castle, but those had already occupied by refugees who had been staying in the castle beforehand.

There was a small window, without glasses as glass was expensive, to the outside from where Brown could see a jungle of tents. The League had occupied the castle since it was the most secure place in the town. There were soldiers who had gotten up early to prepare their breakfast, which was mostly made out of looted goods from plantations nearby, and some had even broken into song to commemorate their victorious morning. Some of those songs were in the language of Gemeinplatz, while some were singing what they could remember from their homelands. There was even a soldier who had constructed a makeshift drum and another who was accompanying him with a finely carved wooden flute. It was disorganized cacophony that had somehow blended into an enjoyable blend.

John Brown, resting his arms on the window, had one thing to say while taking a good look at Gemeinplatz: “This is a beautiful country.”



Unfunny and very much dead meme aside, feedback helps me a lot during the writing process. Unfortunately, I am not a prophet or oracle, and I cannot know what I succeeded in and failed in without the help of the reader. I'd highly appreciate it if I could take a little bit of your time and write some feedback down there in the comments.

I hope you have enjoyed the last chapter of this volume, and I hope to see you in the next volume of the John Brown Isekai!

Hello, it is I, The Cabbage Preacher, and this is the end of the first volume of the John Brown Isekai.

The word document I'm writing this on shows 186k words have been written on this one volume of the John Brown Isekai. That's almost 400 pages of writing done for one volume in over a year of writing, which is pretty crazy to think about. I had originally written the John Brown Isekai as a side project to my main one, and now nobody knows about The Errant Otherworlder but more than a few people know of the John Brown Isekai.

Actually, a lot of people have heard about the John Brown Isekai, but most have apparently dropped it due to finding my writing grating at longer lengths. Which I get – the early chapters of the John Brown Isekai are pretty old at this point, before I had a hundred or so chapters worth of experience to better my writing. I hope that all this writing has done me good and that I have improved somewhat in the later chapters, and I want to thank all of you for sticking with me throughout this whole thing (unless you skipped to the afterword, and if that's the case, what are you doing here? There's a whole John Brown Isekai that you have missed!)

Speaking of thanking people, I want to begin with those in no particular order. Firstly, a thank you to all my Patrons whose names you have been seeing throughout the chapters. A special thank you to those in my Discord who have been regularly giving feedback regularly as I wrote. Thank you to that one bloke who wrote the first John Brown Isekai fanfic. Thank you to the two regular commenters on the SpaceBattles forums who have been there from the beginning. Thank you to the good people on r/JohnBrownIsekai for their memes. Thank you to the odd few who have read my Touhou fanfics as well, especially that one person who made a fanfic of my fanfic and another person who found me through some odd means and proceeded to give some excellent feedback (you know who you are). Thank you to that one guy who really loved *The Errant Otherworlder* and commented on every chapter of it. Thank you to George Orwell for writing *Burmese Days* which served as an inspiration for Gemeinplatz society. Lastly, a very special thanks to all the readers who are here :) (MS Word automatically corrected that emoticon to an emoji and I had to manually turn it back into an emoticon)

Now that the thanks are over with, it's time to get on with the rest of the afterword.

The John Brown Isekai will be marching on as usual with its weekly schedule. I wanted to separate it into volumes for future readers to have a reference point, and the volume separation probably won't matter much for readers who are already following this work. I'm excited to get on to the second volume, which will focus a whole lot more on statecraft now that Brown has managed to survive and not get mauled by a bear. These are the parts that I'm most excited to write, and I hope you will enjoy them when reading.

Thank ye for reading, and I hope you'll enjoy the rest of the John Brown Isekai!

Chapter 105: Prologue II – The conflict that he heralded he looks from heaven to view.

You had better — all you people at the South — prepare yourselves for a settlement of this question, that must come up for settlement sooner than you are prepared for it. The sooner you are prepared the better. You may dispose of me very easily, — I am nearly disposed by now; but this question is still to be settled, — this negro question I mean; the end of that is not yet.

- John Brown, 19th of October 1859, interview given in prison prior to his execution.



12th of April, 1861 3:30 AM
Fort Sumter, South Carolina

It was a cold April night in South Carolina, though the privates manning the fortifications found that the tension building around them was hot enough to make them forget that fact. For weeks they had been under siege by the so-called “Provisional Forces of the Confederate States” of the newly formed “Confederate States of America” with which they had an uneasy truce with. No shots had been fired, no men had died, yet it seemed that war had already begun.

“You think we’ll survive?” asked a private on duty to his comrade standing right next to him on the walls. They held their rifles close, their trigger thinner than hair.

“Depends on whether those hillbillies begin bombardment. If they do, we get shredded to bits. If they don’t, then we starve. Either way, things don’t look too sunny for us.” He kicked a loose brick on the wall. The loose brick fell down and splashed into the Atlantic Ocean beneath and around them. “This fort isn’t even finished. I’ve been garrisoned here for a while, and the guys over in Washington cut the budget to the ground until we got this... big mess. Not that it’d help – we’re less than a hundred guys to the thousands I’ve seen roaming outside the walls.”

The private chuckled, looking up at the stars. In certain death there was at least solitude. “Yeah, that was a stupid question. We can’t even man all the guns here, for the love of...”

“At least that Lincoln should give us the order to attack so we can die an honorable death. We’ve waited here all this time, and what have we achieved but starvation...” His speech was interrupted by an officer passing by. They stopped to look at the man approaching them.

“Bad news. Beauregard has refused our request to evacuate. They have notified to us that they’ll begin bombardment in one hour. Get ready!” The officer sprinted off to notify the rest of the men on the walls.

“An hour?! Jesus Christ...”

“May God have mercy on us.”

It was quiet for a while as the two privates quietly stared into the great sea of darkness in front of them. Out there, in the great stygian void, their upcoming death lay in the barrels of many a cannon.

“So, this is it.” said the private. “I guess we’re the first one to die in this war.”

“Maybe not. I’d say this whole thing started when John Brown raided Harper’s Ferry.”

“John...” The private paused to think about the name. “Ah, I remember that crazy man! Maybe we’d be in peace if he didn’t decide to get up to his nonsense.”

“Eh, I’d say that he only sped up the inevitable. The Southerners disposed of him, but they can’t dispose all the abolitionists in the North.” He took a deep breath, and slowly let it out. “Those Confederates are about to do their best at attempting that though.”

“Ah...” The private crossed himself several times, though one of his hands always had to be busy holding the rifle so it wasn’t a proper cross. “Good God...”

The next hour was spent with prayer and anxiety for the residents of the fort. 4:30 AM came, slow as it felt to come, and a single mortar shell exploded over the fort. He hath loosed the fateful lightning of His terrible swift sword, and the first shot of the American Civil War had just been shot. Receiving their signal to fire, the entire Confederate forces around Fort Sumter began their bombardment in full.



Soon Fort Sumter would fall, but the Union would not.

69th of Summer 5859
Periligoul, Union of Elves

It was a summer night in Periligoul, far from cold but it was still pleasantly breezy thanks to Lake Fairy the Elven settlement was located right next to. Normally a region devoid of visitors save from those wishing to make their way to the dwarves over at Zon'guldac, Periligoul was seeing quite the unusual caravan today: an Imperial delegation from the capital.

“Thank God that this isn’t a long trip. I can’t believe they have a bunch of these so-called ‘elves’ right next door.” said Spear, making his way on a fancy palanquin carried by slaves at the center of the caravan. He stretched himself on the embroidered silk, making himself comfortable while taking a peek out of the curtains of his ride. There seemed to be no city or settlement if he took a brief peek. Looking more closely, and most importantly upwards, one could see an elaborate network of houses and bridges on the gargantuan trees that surrounded the road. It was an architectural marvel, one that Spear would definitely study closer in his spare time. In turn the elves standing on the bridges, who were nothing but a vague humanoid blur from such a distance, were studying Spear and his delegation. There was an air of tension in the air, but Spear ignored it as he was the one comfortably sitting in the palanquin. What he couldn’t ignore was his ride stopping when they reached their destination.

The doors were opened for Spear by his servants, and he came upon one great tree upon exiting his ride. It was a tree at least a hundred meters tall, as thick as ten men standing shoulder to shoulder, and with thick leaves that covered the view of the heavens. The trunk of the tree was covered with symbols and decorations that were unfamiliar to anyone in the caravan. At the top of the tree stood a grand wooden structure, to which led a long ladder that was a hassle to climb. Swearing to invent elevators as soon as possible, Spear climbed the ladders with his procession.

At the top, Spear finally saw elves closely. Two of them were guarding the entrance to the grand building with their bows, and they eyed him suspiciously. These elves were over two meters tall, with lanky bodies that only had muscles in their arms for shooting. Their skin looked so white that one could think that no blood circulated in their body, and their hair was equally light. The elven guards stepped aside to let the procession enter the building, their wooden plates of armor clanking as they moved.

Inside the grand building continued to impress. The floors were made of wood inlaid with gold and silver to weave intricate patterns. Every inch of wall was covered with rugs all equally fancy, and a chandelier in the middle of the ceiling lit it all up. At the end of the room was the most important part: a grand throne, with a grand elf sitting on it. She wore a dress that Spear likened to a green Roman toga, and on her head was a golden wreath with flowers attached to it. She was flanked by two servants who were fanning her to keep her cool.

“Greetings.” The elven chieftainess remained seated in front of the Imperial procession. “What brings humans to my court?”

“Greetings, Chieftainess Tinatin Leafblower. I am Imperial Architect Albert Spear, acting as liaison of His Imperial Majesty Glory XXI Earlyriser.” He gave a formal bow. The elf in front of him was blue-eyed, and blond.

“What business do the Imperials have here? It has been... almost a millennium since any delegation has come from the Empire? I don’t know about my predecessors, but I haven’t seen any delegations during my reign.”

“Well, let’s just say that... things are about to change in the Empire, and we need good *Aryan* blood like yours. Tall, blond, blue eyes... yes, I think it’s clear that the elves are of a pure and noble blood.”

Leafblower had her interest piqued. She rose up from her throne. “What does that mean?”

Spear tied his hands to his back and began pacing around the room. “We have a few proposals; I assure you that they are all beneficial to you and your realm. You reunite the elven chiefdoms under your leadership, drive those pesky dwarves out of their mountain home, the Empire gives you full support during all of the aforementioned, and in exchange you help smooth His Imperial Majesty’s reign and crush a little slave rebellion in the west of Gemeinplatz.”

“Is that all? Just help your emperor and crush some rebellion and finally get the dwarves off our nose?” Leafblower looked at Spear with suspicion, but she couldn’t help but be tempted by such a good deal. “We haven’t gone to war since time immemorial.”

“Is that so? I heard that you did an excellent job exterminating the dark elves.” Spear took out a scroll from his robe. “Your people have a warlike spirit which has been suppressed by the elites in the Empire, and those dwarven merchants who tempt you with their goods.” His speech suddenly got louder and fierier. “Oh, those dwarves! They are like the *Juden*, rats hiding in their caves and swimming in their gold while looking down on all of us! Wouldn’t it be excellent to get rid of them, my lady? To restore your people to glory?”

Leafblower opened the scroll to find an Imperial decree written, signed, and stamped by the emperor himself. It declared Leafblower to be “Supreme Chieftain of All Elves Gemeinplatz”. The March of Zon’guldac, a new title created by this decree, was also conferred to her. “What the...”

There would definitely be a price to this grace bestowed upon her by the Empire, but could she refuse such an offer? “I- I can’t-”,

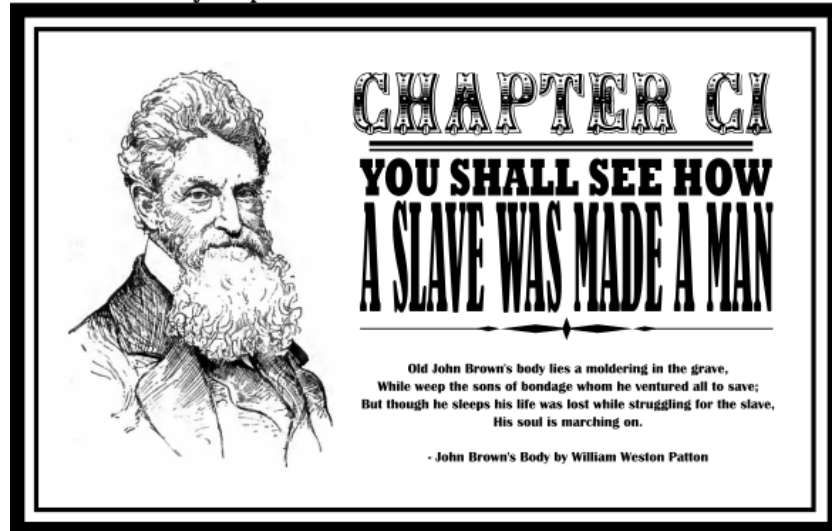
“These titles have already been conferred to you, o’ Marchioness Tinatin Leafblower of Zon’guldac, First of Her Name. Whether you act on your claims or not is up to you.” Spear had a sly smile. Of course, nobody could get such a prestigious title without acting on it. He had learned how to tempt men with grand titles from his beloved Leader. “His Imperial Majesty trusts that you’ll keep the peace in your march, and his doors are open to your delegates if you are in need of help. That is all.”

Spear turned and left the room without another word. He didn’t look back to see Leafblower’s expression, but he knew of the effect that he had.

He hath loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift pen, and the first shot of the Northern Gemeinplatz War had been shot.

Chapter 106: Chapter CI – You shall see how a slave was made a man.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 101



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

I have often been utterly astonished, since I came to the north, to find persons who could speak of the singing, among slaves, as evidence of their contentment and happiness. It is impossible to conceive of a greater mistake. Slaves sing most when they are most unhappy. The songs of the slave represent the sorrows of his heart; and he is relieved by them, only as an aching heart is relieved by its tears. At least, such is my experience. I have often sung to drown my sorrow, but seldom to express my happiness. Crying for joy, and singing for joy, were alike uncommon to me while in the jaws of slavery.

- Excerpt from *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), written by Frederick Douglass.

69th of Summer 5859

Inside the walls surrounding Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

*I bloody hate being a slave
My own son was beaten to death with a stave
Freedom is the only thing that I crave
We are rotting in a state-wide open grave*

As the first original music piece of the League rang out across the garden of Castle Casamonu, Ayomide found her eyes greeted by the morning sun, along with Shinasi sleeping right next to her. She remembered that after meeting in the castle, they had gone out to have a space that was a bit more private. A tent like this one was marginally better than the office of John Brown himself. Then a thing or two had happened while they celebrated victory in Casamonu. Ayomide noticed that her uniform (a bear pelt and gambeson) was on the floor along with her. She got dressed, her back aching from having danced around on the dirt floor of the tent, and got out of the tent to get some fresh air.

The mood was certainly joyous despite the somber songs. Usually those in Libertycave spent time anxiously worrying when a bunch of knights and adventurers would come up and burn their little experiment. The League felt invincible now that they had taken a castle. Not Ayomide however –

the old man had a tendency to ruin her mood by reminding her of reality. Outside these walls were a population of people wishing that the “savages” inside would just get out already. Ayomide could already see a small crowd of citizens curiously peeking in through the gates of the castle. She’d compare them to a crowd in a zoo if she knew what a zoo was. “...you know what, I should have breakfast instead of worrying about these things.” she told to herself.

Ayomide suddenly felt someone’s hand pat her shoulder. “Breakfast? That’s an excellent idea!” It was Shinasi, his hair being in a greater mess than it usually is. “Morning, milady.”

“Morning, Shinasi. Call me ‘milady’ again and I’m cutting your tail off.”

Shinasi smirked. “Which one? I don’t see any tail on me right now... I wonder where you might have seen one if not your own tail?”

“Shut up, you cheeky bastard.” Ayomide gave him a peck on the cheek with a smile. “Save that talk for later. I’m hungry.”

“I see, hungry and grumpy.” He pointed to a pot of whatever that was cooking up nearby. “Let’s get some of whatever they’re making.”

“Sounds like a plan.” The pair walked to the cooking soldiers and sat right next to them. “Good morning, gents and ladies.” They were cooking wheat gruel with spring onions on top: not the most pleasant of dishes, but it was 5-star cooking worthy of emperors compared to the nothing they got as slaves.

As they waited for the pot to boil, conversation was happening between the soldiery. “You know, I used to live in a maize plantation. That stuff is way better than wheat, even if you just eat it straight off the cob.”

“Maize? I’ve never seen it. What does it look like?”

“It’s like wheat, but much bigger and juicier. And, the best part is, you can just eat it without having to prepare it. We used to sneak a few cobs into our gobs without the master noticing.”

“That sounds like the fruit they’d eat in the heavens...”

“It definitely is worthy of the gods; I’ll say that much.”

Ayomide turned to Shinasi. “Have you ever seen this maize in your adventures?”

“Sometimes merchants bought maize and sold it in Azdavay, but I have never had the chance to taste one.”

“I see... we should get some if we find it.”

By the time their idle conversation was done, the onion-flavored gruel was done. Everybody took a spoon and dug into the pot directly. Such was the way in Gemeinplatz, where washing separate plates would be too much of a bother. Food was food, a spoon was a spoon, and they were all very hungry so they dug in without thought of silly things like “germs”.

“You know, we could grow some maize here as well.” quipped the former slave from before “If you get me some seeds, I bet I could get a nice field going. I learnt all about farming the stuff back when I was working the fields.”

“You, good sir!” An old man’s voice came from the heavens, startling the diners. It was John Brown, who had been watching them from above in the castle. “Wait for a second there, I’m coming down!” Five minutes passed until the old man managed to drag his old bones down the winding corridors of the castle and make his way to the dining soldiers.

“What’s the haste, old man?” asked Ayomide. She extended a spoonful of gruel “Have some breakfast at the least.”

“I appreciate it, young lady, but I’ll use my own spoon. Before that, you!” He pointed at the maize man “You are the kind of person I’m looking for! What is your name, good sir?”

“What, me? I- they call me Maize, captain.”

“Pleased to meet you, Mister Maize.” Brown shook the man’s hand “What say you about owning your own field and gathering some of your friends to do some agriculture?”

“I wouldn’t oppose that captain, I’ve been in this one battle and I already want to lay down my weapons and settle down.” replied Maize. “I don’t know where we’ll get the land though. Don’t the noblemen own all the land?”

Brown pointed to a particularly tall tree nearby. Trees were his favorite tools in land reform. “We’ve been drafting plans with General Tubman for comprehensive land reform in Gemeinplatz. The first phase of that, delivering swift justice to the landowners who have committed crimes against humanity, is already underway. There won’t be many of them left after we’re done with the trials. The second phase is redistributing the empty land to those who’ll actually use it. Tubman told me about the Homestead Act, which gave me a few ideas. The third phase will be to help those who have already settled, but I’m going way too far ahead.”

The soldiers were surprised at their captain rambling on about land. They stood silent, trying to digest what had just been said to them. Finally, Maize spoke up “So, captain, you’re saying that I can have my own land?”

“If you’re willing to find a few people to join you in your homestead, then yes. I’ve been delaying all this back in Libertycave, but I think now is an appropriate time to think about peaceful manners for once.” He yawned. “Apologies, I stayed up late last night making revisions for the constitution... We have to make some changes now that we are in control of several distinct settlements. I’ll put matters of land reform up to a vote in today’s gathering of the council. You should find yourself some fellow farmers in the meantime. I’ll be going back to the castle to draft the Homesteading Act of Gemeinplatz.” With this, Brown left as quickly as he had come.

“What an odd man.” said Maize while watching Brown leave. “Is he always like this?”

“Yeah.” replied Ayomide. “I’ve been with him since the start, and the old man is an oddity even amongst the odd otherworlders.”

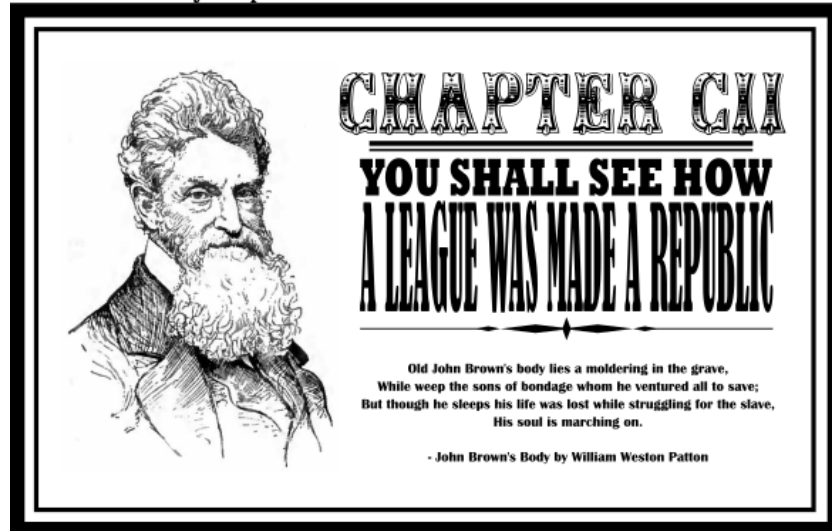
“He does his job though, so I can’t complain.” added Shinasi.

Ayomide nodded. “That much is true. Eccentric he may be, I doubt most of his crazy ideas are ever going to become reality, the old man did manage to make from nothing a force strong enough to take a castle.”

“Quite the busy man indeed...” murmured Maize, looking at the distance to the fields he’d soon cultivate.

Chapter 107: Chapter CII – You shall see how a League was made a republic.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 102



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

70th of Summer 5859 Inside the walls of Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

There was a congregation, quite the large one, inside the walls of Casamonu. This one wasn't made of refugees, no, this congregation made in a semi-donut shape that was the signature mark of the Provisional Council of Curry. With the fall of a large settlement had risen many a problem, chiefly:

"So, how will we all gather together for a council now that we have Libertycave, Azdavay, and now here to deal with?" asked Ayomide right at the start of the gathering. "We can't really have everyone here."

"That much is true," added Tubman "some of our members have retired to stay back in Azdavay, and there are more who plan on retiring here in Casamonu. Gathering them in one place constantly would be a bother."

Brown raised his hand "Now, now. I have been working on a solution for this. Behold!" he unfurled a scroll that contained a bunch of text, which was as good as gibberish to the people in the room.

"...captain, we can't read."

"Excuse me... ahem! Let me summarize!" Brown cleared his throat a few more times. "The issue we've grown a bit too large to be a league of fugitives. Nothing that we can't sort out. Therefore, I have a proposal to you fine gents: we'll be founding a republic."

"Found a republic?" Ayomide, and many others in the room, looked around for one of these so-called "republic" things "Do we need to go on a journey to find it?"

"No, no. I meant making one!"

"It sounds like a complicated thing to make. Will it take long?"

“Where do we find the ingredients for it?”

“I can cook something good if it’s food...”

“Stop, people, republics are not food!” shouted Tubman. She had gotten sick of the misled discussion. “A republic is a type of... well, we’ve sort of had a makeshift republic already.”

“Then what is the difference between a republic and democracy?” asked a member of the audience.

“...that doesn’t matter right now.” said John Brown. He wasn’t in the mood to get into political science. “The thing that matters is that we should separate the League, the military side, from the civilian side of our operations. That’s what I meant by founding a republic, and I have something very similar to our League’s constitution right here. We need to make something that the liberated people of Gemeinplatz can participate in, while keeping the abolitionist activities of the League alive.”

Shinasi nodded. “It’s a good idea. As long as those twerps in town stop looking at us suspiciously every time we pass by them.”

“Here is the plan:” Brown pointed at the relevant articles in the paper despite such an act being futile for most of the people in the room “Firstly, we shall found a republic. ‘Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz’ rings nicely in my ears, but I’m sure you might have suggestions for a better name. Now, in a federal republic, administration work is given to local elected leaders.”

“Kind of like the lords and mayors of Gemeinplatz?” asked Ayomide “I don’t want them back.”

“The thing about lords is that they aren’t elected, young lady, and the elected mayors definitely won’t have as much power as the lords. Secondly, we have to conduct elections for those leaders, is what I’d say, but I think it’s pretty clear that we are in an emergency situation.”

“Wouldn’t people elect someone who’d kick us out anyways?” said a League member from the congregation.

“Exactly, that is the problem. Now, that’s why we ban anyone pro-slavery or anti-League from running.” Brown definitely didn’t like the implications of such an anti-democratic act, but he had to be honest to himself in accepting that Gemeinplatz wasn’t all that ready for proper elections. “Vaiz has screened some well-connected and supportive candidates in Casamonu and Azdavay who’ll be happy collaborating with the League. I don’t think people will be as willing to rise up against someone that they have ‘elected’.” It was an odd feeling, to be essentially setting up a puppet government in another world. “This republic will have a council of elected representatives, while the League should be freed up from doing the work of administrating civil manners and gathering so much.”

Brown paused for a minute to let the congregation discuss his proposal. After things had quieted down, he returned to speaking “Now, after that comes the part that the League will come to play. I propose that we keep the League as part of the army that this republic will have. The League shall function as a separate organization dedicated to special operations related to abolitionism, such as raids on plantations and other slaver establishments. I think having our organization dedicated to unconventional warfare, rather than the conventional, would be the best case.”

“What about the people that have left the League and... well, do they get to be part of this republic?” asked another current member of the League. “My friend retired to harvest something

called 'maize', and I'm worried about him."

"Anyone who is in Gemeinplatz will be part of the republic, while the League will be a separate organization for freemen that requires membership." clarified Brown "Speaking of harvesting maize, that is related to the final part of the plan: getting support. I'll be honest in saying that the people outside the walls look at us as nothing but a band of savages. Me, and everyone else in this room, knows that they are mistaken, but it'll take a while to rid the people of their misconceptions. Therefore, I propose that we get support for the republic through a simple method: the stomach. The people value their ability to eat, and we shall provide them free land so that they can eat. Plus, with all the farming infrastructure that we have burnt down, we need to get agriculture back running before we face a famine. I have a Homesteading Act ready, one which I hope to pass at this council along with the constitution of the republic. Now, on to voting!"

Today, on the 70th of Summer 5859, the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz was born, with Brown as its Commander-in-Chief with provisional emergency powers and other positions yet to be elected. The League was to be the first military unit of the Republic, and the Republic was to be the first republic in Gemeinplatz.

Chapter 108: Interlude – Heavy is the head who wears the crown.

Clang clang clang! “Wake up tots!”

Tater, the former slave of Jacob Smith the maid café owner, found himself waking up to the sound of banging pots, as had been usual for... a long while. He had sort of lost count of the progression of time since his emancipation. He stood up and straightened himself on his bed, which had a newly quilted sheet. He scratched his arms and legs which had been scratching like hell all night. Still, the boy preferred a badly made quilt to the piles of straw on the ground that he used to sleep on.

Clang, clang! “It’s time for breakfast! Come on now, the food is going to get cold if you don’t hurry your bums up.”

Immediately Tater got up. The “kitchen” was across a few beds similar to his, inhabited by folk similar to his age. It was a cramped room indeed. Tater got to the kitchen, also a dining room and a bedroom considering all were in the same room, and sat on another quilt on the ground meant as seating. The food was set on a low “table” made out of several disjointed planks of wood laid on the floor covered by a large tablecloth. Contrary to the ascetic status of the dining arrangement, the food on the table was one worthy of emperors... or at least that’s what Tater thought as he dug into slime gruel flavored with mint. Having never seen luxury, Tater had no clue as to what an emperor would eat. “Hey.” he asked to his fellow tots on the table “Any of you ever wonder what the breakfast of the emperor would be like?” He heard a few chuckles from the table and a few angry glares clearly telling him to not talk while eating.

Unable to solve this great mystery of emperor-worthy food, Tater went back to dipping some unleavened bread into the slime gruel. Maybe the emperor got to have a really big pot of slime all to himself? Gold? Were there slimes made of gold? Then that’s definitely what the emperor would have: golden slime. Gold slime soup for breakfast, gold slime pie for lunch, gold slime soap for a shower and gold slime candy to have with tea before sleep. *Gold slime... that’d taste heavenly I bet*, thought Tater. He’d love to have some of whatever that was. It’d surely be better than his now-empty bowl.

“Hmm...” Tater heard an older boy across from him hum loudly in thought. He was Ejike, the former butler of Sir Algernon. Right next to him was his older sister Ekene. “Tater, I don’t think emperors have breakfast.”

“What? How?” Tater leaned forward in curiosity. “How can someone not have breakfast?”

“It’s a simple thing.” continued Ekene, taking over from her brother “The late Algernon was quite busy, and he only requested that we get him a drink for breakfast. I imagine that a big man bigger than him, like the emperor, would be way too busy of a guy to have breakfast.”

“Not even some morning tea like all the other big men have?” said Tater in horror.

“Probably not.”

“Woah...” Young Tater looked at his empty bowl. “Does an emperor even get to eat? Poor guy.”

“I mean, it’d explain why all the big guys are such big gits. They all just need to take a break and enjoy some good food.” Ejike sipped some tea out of a clay mug and let out a content sigh.

“They’re all just jealous of us, I think. Can’t make their lives better so they gotta ruin ours.”

“...if I find a crown in the gutter, I won’t wear it then.” concluded Tater.

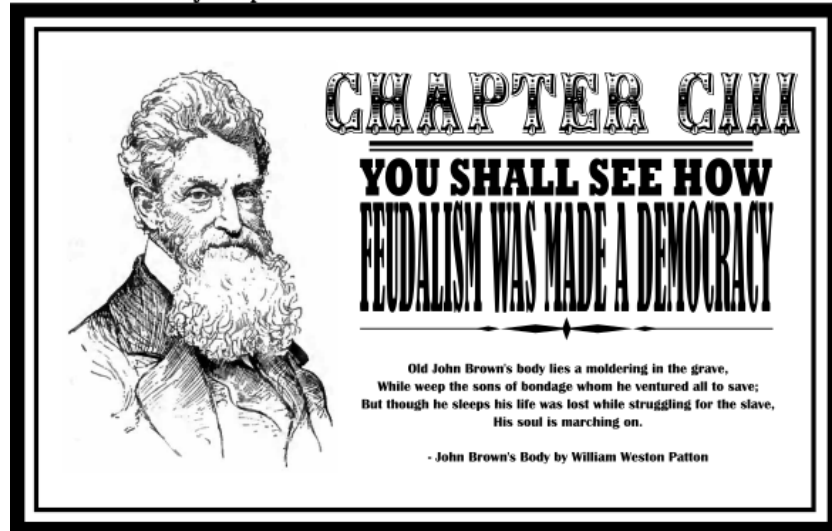
Thus, the kids of Hakim Orphanage in Libertycave learned an important lesson just in case they were somehow handed a crown by a stranger looking to trap them in no-breakfast hell.

Sorry for the short interlude this week - I had only one day after returning from a vacation, and I was very tired, so I only had time to make an interlude chapter.

Anyways, happy New Year's! Here's to another year of John Brown Isekai!

Chapter 109: Chapter CIII – You shall see how feudalism was made a democracy.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 103



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

70th of Summer 5859 A building, Casamonu

There was a building in Casamonu, unnoticeable as it was overshadowed by the castle it was close to yet it held more power than many would realize. Inside were several odd wooden machines that would look similar to grape or olive oil presses to an untrained eye. There were no olives or grapes to press with these machines however, for these were presses of another type.

A fancifully dressed man, the fanciest of all in the room, was pacing around the room while giving orders. His hat had a feather on it which stood tall and proud, and his mustache was as black as the ink he worked with. “Get the woodblocks in order, we’re behind our quota for the day.” He was speaking frantically, rushing around the room to inspect each and every worker. The man even intervened in the work now and then, pushing around woodblocks and moving lead types around to create sentences and even paragraphs. From bold letters to fancy italics, they had all the types of types that they needed to print something good-looking, even including letters from the otherworldly languages. To the top went the bold and decorated titles, the officers of type, and to their bottom went their less fanciful looking privates.

“Sir Inkwell, if I may ask,” asked one particularly tired worker holding up a written order for a printing job “the city has fallen. We’re no longer in Imperial territory. Do we still have to print out this Imperial proclamation that we received?”

Inkwell nodded without a thought. “Yes, we do. My family has worked for generations to get the permission to allow this press from His Imperial Majesty himself, and you’re telling me to abandon my duty?” He paused to wipe his hand on a towel, which now had his inky fingerprints on it “You can leave. I’d run this whole printery by myself if I needed to.”

“A-alright, sir...” The worker was about to reluctantly go back to typesetting when...

KNOCK, KNOCK!

“Who are you?” shouted out Inkwell “It has been a while since anyone has visited us.”

A young female voice cried out from behind the door “It’s me, father, it’s me!”

“Azra?” Inkwell rushed to open the door “I thought you had escaped to Azdavay...” He didn’t finish the sentence upon seeing the two who had followed his daughter to the door. “Who are you?”

“Watanabe Haruhi, though many refer to me as the Hero round these parts.” Watanabe flicked his hair in an attempt to look cool and heroic.

“Doctor Rabanowicz, at your service.” Rabanowicz made a polite curtsy with the hem of her gambeson “We’re here to talk to your about making use of your services.”

“I’m grateful for you having brought back my daughter, but I can’t let just anyone use the printing press. They’re for use by Imperial permission only.”

“The Empire is no more, Sir Inkwell, at least not in Casamonu. We’re in the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz now. Imperial restrictions on printing are no longer relevant. The Commander-in-Chief asks that you print copies of the new republican constitution along with deeds for the homesteading program.” Rabanowicz took out and handed him a written copy of what was to be printed. Inkwell gave it back to her without taking a look.

“Sorry, but I can’t comply with your demands.”

“Father-”

“Azra, there are some things in life that you never ever accept. I’m not selling out my honor and the family name.” He opened his arms and turned to his visitors “Do what you must.”

“Printing is critical, Sir Inkwell. If you don’t comply, then we must seize your printery.” Seeing that Inkwell wasn’t cooperating, Rabanowicz heaved a very deep sigh. “Unfortunately, we must do what we must. We’ll compensate you monetarily for the equipment we seize, and your daughter will take over operations.” She turned to the workers who had stopped to listen in to the conversation. “Your knowledge is quite valuable. You’ll be compensated well with a high wage if you continue working in printing.”

Inkwell opened the door and left the building without saying any more, while the workers gathered around Azra, the Miss Inkwell. “As the doctor said, we must print out these orders from the Federal Republic.”

“What about what we were already printing?” asked the worker from before. “We recently received an Imperial proclamation that we were meant to print out.”

Rabanowicz’s spectacles almost slipped off her nose from the surprise. “How did you... Did a messenger sneak through the walls?”

“Not really sneak in, they just entered Casamonu and hadn’t heard about the takeover yet. We found the printing order in our inbox, so we didn’t have a chance to inform or see the messenger.” He gave the order, which Inkwell had left on a nearby table, to Rabanowicz.

“...this seems quite important.” Rabanowicz slipped the order into one of the many pockets in her gambeson.

Azra clapped her hands to get everyone’s attention back on her. “Let’s not worry about that right now. Forget the Imperials, we must get these deeds printed as soon as possible.”

“I’ll leave that up to you, my lady.” butted in Watanabe the Hero. “I’m sure you’ll do work so excellent that your name is printed on to history books.”

“Ahem, yeah, sure.” Rabanowicz gently prodded Watanabe out the door, while she walked closer to one of the printing presses in the room. She knelt down and adjusted her spectacles to get a close look to the wooden behemoths of engineering. “Do you have any craftsmen who deal with these machines?”

“No, we have to bring specialists from the Imperial capital for these.” replied a worker “We can only do basic maintenance on these.”

Rabanowicz touched the wooden beams on the press, before she moved on to the metal screws and bolts on the machine “This seems to be a rudimentary contraption at best. I’ll be reserving one to examine for a few days.” She shooed away the workers around her with her hand “Go on with your work, I’ll be busy here.”

70th of Summer 5859

Inside the walls of Casamonu Castle, Casamonu

“Captain Brown,” Rabanowicz entered the room after a few courteous knocks “I have visited the printing press as you asked. That girl was right – she was indeed the daughter of a printer. The prints you asked for should be done by tomorrow, they said.”

Brown was sitting on the chair that he had basically claimed as his own in the former count’s office. Sure, the count had a sofa or two, but sitting on that made the old man sleepy. He preferred the simple, utilitarian chair. It did what it had to do, and in that Brown found something divine that he’d love to philosophize about if anyone was willing to listen. “Excellent work, doctor.”

“There is another thing you should know.” Rabanowicz folded out the printing order she had gotten from before “Apparently the printers got orders to print an Imperial edict. I haven’t had the chance to read it yet.” She handed the piece of paper to Brown.

“Hmm...” Brown looked at the paper, being unable to read the native Gemeinplatzish script. Taking a closer look, he noticed that a transcription in Latin script had been provided with a note under it saying “for the otherworlders”

“Can you read it, or do I need to bring Vaiz over?”

“No, there’s a translation here. Let’s see...” Brown cleared his throat in preparation. “‘Decree Relating to the Appointment of Her Majesty Chieftainess Tinatin Leafblower as Supreme Chieftain of All Elves in Gemeinplatz and Marchioness of Zon'guldac’. That’s the title of this.”

“Zon’guldac? I think that’s the next province over.” replied Rabanowicz. She had been studying the geography of Gemeinplatz, along with everything else about it, ever since she had learned the

Gemeinplatz script in two days. “I wonder why they’d appoint an elf to head the dwarves though.”

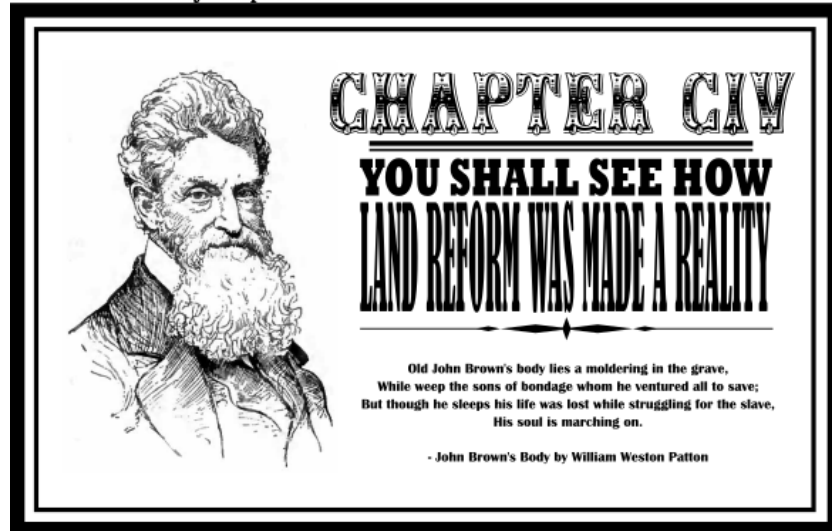
“Let’s see. ‘In the name of His Imperial Majesty: The increasing slave-related unrest in the Casamonu has been exacerbated by the Union of Dwarves being uncooperative. The dwarves have long harbored fugitives, and while His Imperial Majesty has yet to take any action out of his goodwill, the subversive actions of the dwarves can no longer be ignored. Therefore, the special status of the Union of Dwarves under the Empire has been revoked, and their territory shall be transferred over to a most trusted elven chieftain: Her Majesty Tinatin Leafblower.”

“That does make sense. A lot of the slaves we’ve freed made their way to Zon’guldac.”
Rabanowicz tied her hands behind her back, making rounds around the room while listening to Brown.

“Yes, but I do believe there to be ulterior motives if they decided to take action now rather than before. Let’s continue. Ahem! ‘To protect against potential threats in the boundaries of the Empire, Her Majesty has been given mandate to rule the elven race in the name of His Imperial Majesty to act as a shield against any hostile activity on the border. All neighboring lords are urged to help her in any way they can against potential hostile activity in the hinterlands. May the Divine bless this decree and the Empire.”

Chapter 110: Chapter CIV – You shall see how land-reform was made a reality.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 104



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

73rd of Summer 5859 Yellowclover, Outskirts of Casamonu

It was yet another late Summer day in Gemeinplatz. As summer came to a close so did the foot-cooking head-scorching sweat-making heat start to retreat away. Some trees, anxious to welcome the Fall, had already began browning their leaves and littering them ever so carelessly. Wherever one walked there was a crunch to their step, except when the occasional rain came and replaced the crunch with the slosh of mud.

For the villagers of Yellowclover, today was to be a slosh day. Shinasi Sr. woke up at his hut to see his daughter Shirin getting her boots on. “Morning, Shirin.”

Shirin jumped, startled by the sudden voice. The jump made the oversized boots come off. “Oh- oh, it’s you, papa. Morning!”

“Where are you going at such an early hour?” asked Shinasi. He could see from the open door that the outdoors was still painted an orange hue from the newly risen sun.

“The fields. Uncle next door told me that they’ll start sowing the winter wheat today.” Shirin got back into her boots, tying them with a piece of rope to her ankles so that they wouldn’t come off while working.



The old Shinasi scratched his balding head. “Wait, which field? Did they get permission from the lord?” Thinking about it, he hadn’t seen any tax collectors in a while... “Normally, we’d have to get our plots for the year assigned by the lord.”

Shirin simply shrugged “Uncle says the lord man has been gone for a while so the plots are free to use. He says that he’d rather break the law than starve.”

“I guess... Those fugitives did end up killing a lot of the metalplates.” He had even heard rumors from a few passersby that Casamonu had fallen, but Shinasi was a bit skeptical of such outlandish claims.

“Papa, if the lord dies, who does the land belong to?” asked Shirin.

Shinasi Sr. wasn’t expecting to be hit by a child’s curiosity this early in the morning. “Uhm... I guess it’d go to the Emperor until he assigns another lord?”

Shirin tilted her head. “Who assigns the Emperor then?”

“...”

“...?”

“A... A bigger Emperor?”

“I guess?”

“Shirin, dear, can we stop it with the weird questions for a second and get me outside at least?”

Shinasi did his best to right himself up for pickup. It was a bit hard to do when he could only use his arms and not his legs. At best he could push himself up with his arms. Shirin ran to him and did her best to drag him up. It was a bit hard to do considering her small stature. Eventually her father was brought to a chair outside with a nice view. “Thank you, Shirin.”

“I’ll be heading to the field now. See you!” said Shirin, leaving the man alone to bask in the sun. She only took a few steps forward before she was interrupted by noise coming from afar. “Drums?”

“What are they?” Shinasi instinctively tried to stand up to take a look “Are they bandit metalplates again?”

“They don’t have armor.” replied Shirin looking at the small mass of man in the distance “They’re the same men that brother came with last time.”

“It should be fine then. Could you welcome them?”

Shirin nodded and ran to greet the crowd approaching the middle of the village. The group contained a few spear-armed soldiers with familiar uniforms, a few unarmed people carrying goods on their back and a man at the front with a knapsack. The priest hailed Shirin “Good morning.”

“Good morning!” Shirin felt a bit overwhelmed by the group “Are you traders?”

“No, we’re representatives of the... umm...” The man took out a piece of paper out from his knapsack, along with a handbell that he began ringing “The... ‘The Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz’.” He had trouble pronouncing the words ‘federal’ and ‘republic’.

The two strange words caused much confusion in young Shirin as well “Fed... Fede-what-lic?”

The town crier stayed silent, for he too knew not. The new people over at Casamonu had just employed him to tour the countryside and read what had been given to him. While the two had briefly conversed, the whole village had been drawn by the sound of drums and bell. They were crowding around the strangers. “We’re from the people over at Casamonu, who have declared themselves... ourselves, they- we have declared that we are not to have any lords above us.”

“Uhm...” The peasantry proved that they understood things as much as the priest.

“Ahem, ahem... Ahem! Hear ye, this is an official announcement!” Giving up on paraphrasing, the crier locked his eye on to the printed sheet in his hands “We, as the people of Gemeinplatz, hereby declare that Gemeinplatz belongs to all those living in it, and that the people of Gemeinplatz have been robbed of their birthright of liberty and equality. Therefore, we have united together under one Union and adopted this Constitution to protect our inalienable rights. The free people of Gemeinplatz, declare that we do not accept any human authority, up to and including the Emperor of Gemeinplatz, to be above us...” He then continued on to read each and every article of the constitution, a constitution which was very similar to the one adopted by the League of Gileadites, which took a long while. “...With a majority of the vote, John Brown has been declared Commander-in-Chief of the Republic and granted emergency powers for a year. The President and representatives for the Congress of Gemeinplatz are to be elected in three days at polling stations in Casamonu, Azdavay and Libertycave. Upon adoption of this constitution, printed copies are to be distributed to every settlement in control of the Republic. Town criers shall read copies of the constitution in cities and travel to the countryside to let everyone be informed. One copy of the constitution should be handed to every settlement free-of-charge for public edification.”

“A rebellion then?” blurted out one of the peasants watching.

Shirin was about to ask “what’s a ‘rebellion’?” before she was rudely interrupted by the town crier ringing his bell again. The town crier handed a copy of the Constitution to one of the soldiers, who nailed the copy to the nearest door that he could find. Then the crier took out another paper and began reading that after another ring of the bell. “Homesteading Act of 5859: The Commander-in-Chief has authorized the first act of the newly established Republic to ensure that the long-oppressed peasants of Gemeinplatz have the right to work the land that they live on...” Before the crier could continue, his speech was blocked by the stir that his last sentence caused.

“Huh? First no lords, and now we work the land?”

“What does that even mean?!”

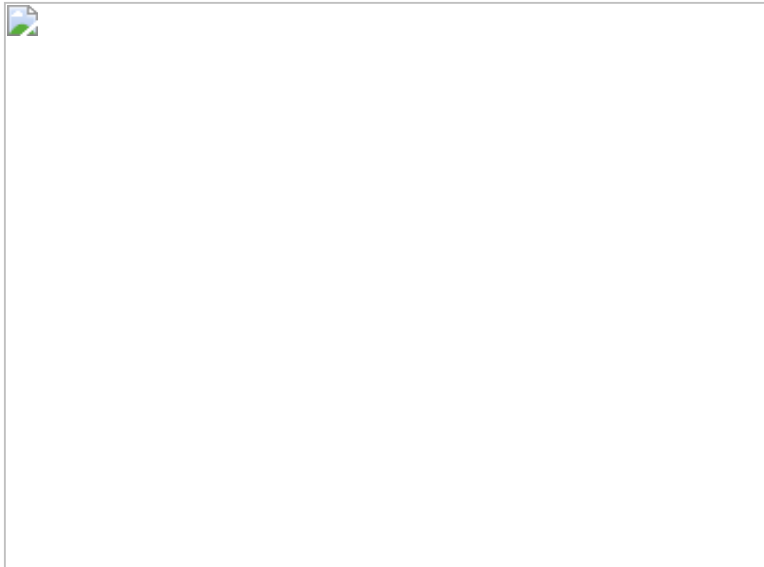
“Do we all get to be lords?”

The town crier shut them up by ringing his bell again. “Ahem! Hear ye: From now on, all titles of nobility are null and void. Their lands are to be confiscated. Records kept by former lords are to be inspected. Every household found within these records are to be compensated with enough land to feed their family with a surplus. Similarly, freed slaves who apply are to be given enough land to feed themselves and any family they have. Deeds for the land are to be distributed after this announcement has been read by the crier.” The crier stuffed the announcement back into his knapsack, while the other people around him took books out and began reading names.

“Ege the Yellowbelly of Yellowclover, son of Efe the Yellowbellied!”

“Here?” The man in question stepped forwards. He was handed a small piece of paper. It had a printed deed on it. The details for the deed had been filled by hand on top of the template, declaring the man in question to own a certain amount of land near Yellowclover.

“Shinasi the Lame of Yellowclover, son of Shinasi the Porter!”

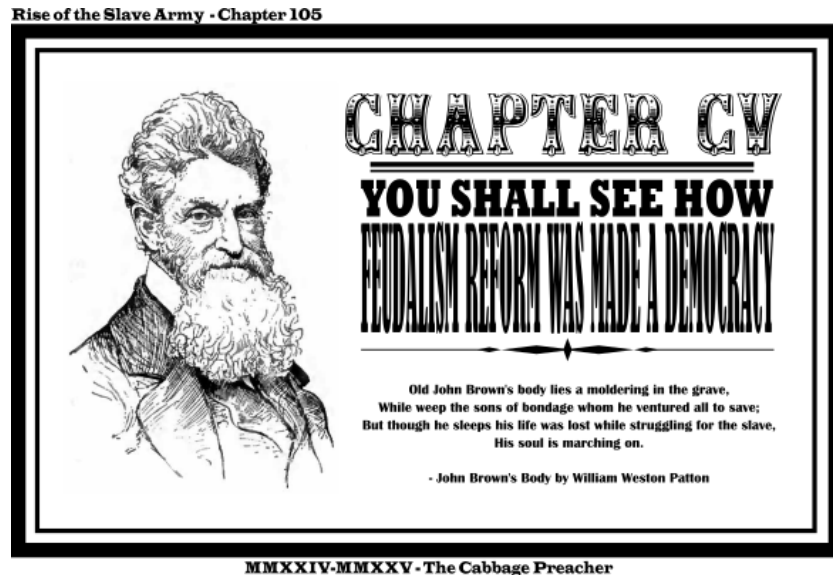


Shirin stepped forward. “That’s my father. His legs are lame, so I’ll take the deed for him.” The man giving the deed looked at the crowd’s reaction to see if the girl was joking. They didn’t seem to have a problem, so Shirin received the piece of paper that seemed to have some sort of significance. She waited around while others waited for their names to be declared and for them to receive a deed. The confusion of the sudden land grant turned into excitement as the peasants began showing off their fancy pieces of paper to each other. If not for the abolishment of lord titles, they’d have all just become lords just from the virtue of owning land. Some peasants had even begun favorably talking about this odd John Brown guy that had visited their village a few days ago.

With the land distribution done, the crier took out a small piece of paper “A message from John Brown, to be read publicly: ‘Fellow citizens of our new Union! In three days, we’ll have elections. Unlike the days of yore, you’ll be free to choose who to lead you to the future. You are free to choose another man do declare himself emperor and rule over you as before. You are also free to choose men in favor of the Republic. The Republic: she who now has granted you land to cultivate. You are all free men. The choice between the two is yours. I’ll await you all at the polling station on the 76th.”

Apologies for the lack of chapter last week. I was still sick, and I couldn't summon any energy to get up and write, so I decided to not upload a chapter this week (a first in John Brown Isekai history). Hopefully I won't get so sick again!

Chapter 111: Chapter CV – You shall see how feudalism was made a democracy.



76th of Summer 5859

Polling Station (Adventurer's Guild of Casamonu), Casamonu

“The big city... not quite as big as I imagined.” Shakira murmured to herself, taking in the scenery of Casamonu's central square. It was impressive, she had to admit at least that, but it was more of the same as Azdavay. Craftsmen who had set up their stalls there, other merchants here, some acrobats soliciting money yonder... She had expected everything to be bigger, maybe some buildings ten stories tall, impressively humongous mansions fit for giants, maybe a giant beanstalk that'd take her to the sky, or anything more or less as impressive. Turns out, the big city is just a city over a wider area, not a bigger city in the literal sense of the word.

“This is nothing compared to the Imperial capital, believe me. Everything is way bigger in Hauptstadt.” Shakira turned around to again see Azra Inkwell, who seemed to have the special ability to pop behind Shakira whenever she talked to herself.

“By the Divine above... it's you again. Did you end up coming back already?” Shakira took a few steps back to take a full look at her surprise companion. Azra had gotten herself a glow-up, in the form of a few metal hairpins and a dazzling blue dress. “I see that you've had time for vanity.”

Azra let out a hearty laugh. “Oh, is it wrong for a young lady like myself to treat herself? You should get yourself something too, Shaki.”

I'm 'Shaki' now? “I work as an adventurer. Fancy garbs aren't tools of my trade.” Shakira knocked on the flat surface of her comically large sword which lay hanging on her back. “This baby costs as much as your entire wardrobe.”

“Of course, Miss Shakira. The world both needs fair maidens,” she first pointed to herself “and the world also needs heroes with fair swords.” Then Azra knocked on Shakira's oversized sword with fascination. “How do you even carry that thing?”

“I trained really hard.” answered Shakira.

“...can you achieve *that* by training really hard?” Azra rolled up her sleeves and flexed her muscles. There turned out to be little to nothing to flex.

“Eh, maybe?” Shakira shrugged. “I trained really hard. I really, really did.”

Azra took another good look at the comically, ridiculously large sword before giving up and shrugging. “I guess – look!” She pointed at a crowd slowly gathering at the square. “I think they’re here for the election.”

“The ‘elekshun’? The thing that the fancy people do to elect a mayor?” Shakira watched as people began gathering in front of the town crier. Next to him was three people who dressed respectfully.

“It’s not only for the fancy people anymore. The Hero told me so: back in his world, every person could vote. So, you can join in as well. Follow me!”

Shakira sighed at the enthusiasm of her younger counterpart, but she also couldn’t beat her curiosity as to what an ‘election’ would entail. She followed Azra to the nexus of where the crowd gathered. They were now close enough to hear the town crier speak.

“...and that’s how the representatives will gather in the Council to vote on new laws. As for the election itself, it’ll be quite simple. You’ll gather around who you want elected, and we’ll go off of a headcount. Now, the mayoral candidates will be giving their speeches.”

The first candidate stepped forward. From his garb, white robes flowing down to his ankles, it was clear that he was a member of the clergy. He was familiar to Shakira and Azra, as it was Vaiz from the League. “Good morning, my fellows in the Divine. I can see that you have many questions and anxieties, but worry not. The Hero is here, and our Republic shall stand with him. Elect me, and I promise to...” Vaiz hadn’t had much time to prepare a speech for election. He was a priest, not a politician. “...uh, do a good job!” His speech got a few in the crowd to cheer, but the few cheers only made the following silence more awkward.

The second candidate stepped forward. “Uhm... I thought this was where we were going to arrive to cast our vote. Apologies, I’m not a candidate.” He awkwardly ran to the crowd standing in front of the town crier.

The third candidate, or the second candidate depending on the method used to count, stepped forward. He was a fancifully dressed man with a mustache as black as ink. “People of Casamonu! Do you not see the madness that goes on here? I am Yaz Inkwell, a faithful servant of the Empire. A gang of savages has taken over your home, and all you can do is gawk in awe? They seized my press yesterday, soon they’ll seize all of us and all our children will be naught but brownish mutts! Wake up, and let not go of your emperor! Do you really think that a bunch of fugitive slaves have your best interests in mind? Would they rule you as good as the emperor, whose lineage goes back several millennia, could?” There was quite a whole lot more fervor in answer to the speech of Sir Inkwell. He received shouts of support and hands clapping in unison.

“Oh dear, I don’t think the Republic guy will be staying here for long.” said Shakira. Azra was quiet, quite appalled by her father’s performance. “Why don’t they just execute him like the others, I wonder?” Suddenly, Shakira was pushed from behind. “Watch your step!” There was a whole crowd of people behind her. Judging from their dirty clothes and simple hats, these were peasants from rural Casamonu. She hadn’t noticed them come in just now.

“Uhm...” The town crier watched the sudden influx of peasants. “Ah... Let’s get on with the voting then. Mr. Vaiz, please stand on this side. Mr. Inkwell, on the other side. Whoever is on the left half of the square shall count as a vote towards Vaiz, and the right side shall be a vote for Inkwell.”

“I’m not Mister Inkwell. *Sir* Inkwell, that is who I am.”

“But sir- uhm, mister, all noble titles have been a-ah... abolished.” The town crier bowed to the nobleman in apology anyways. “Ahem! Voting starts now!”

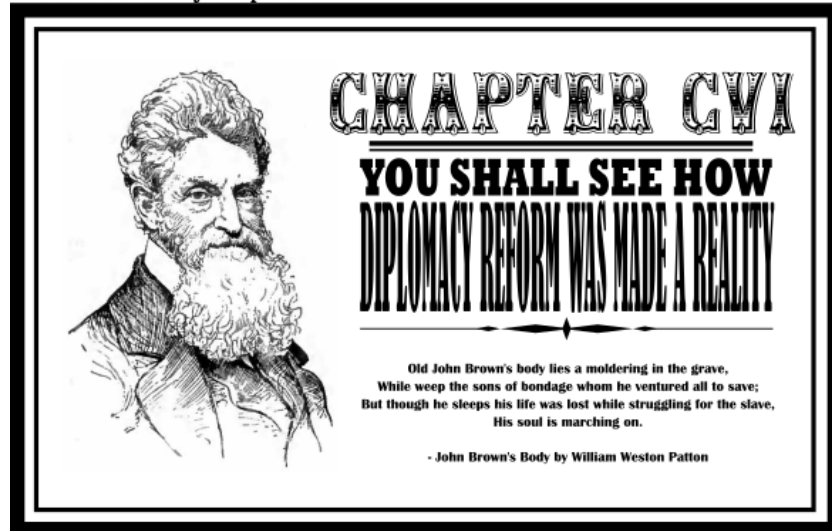
The crowd started moving like a rushing river. Some on the right moved to the left, some on the left went right, and those in the middle had to find their way across this two-front assault. In the end, there were way too many people to come to a quick consensus. The two crowds seemed to be sized similarly. The poor town crier had his work cut out for him. “Everyone, please line up. I’ll have to count each one of you individually.”

Now came the part where the town crier would have to individually count everyone in the crowd.

“This is going to take a while.” commented Shakira, who had stayed out of the vote by sitting at some corner. “Might as well take a nap...”

Chapter 112: Chapter CVI – You shall see how diplomacy was made a reality.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 106



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

76th of Summer 5859 Aroghlie (Zon'guldac), Union of Dwarves

Whitebeard took a deep breath. Salty seawater rushed into her nostrils, but she didn't care about the burning sensation. It was home, or to be more exact, it was closer to home than the filthy beardless humans back in Casamonu were. In fact, far away in the distance, was Aroghlie in the form of a vague black blob. It was hard to believe, even for her, that a whole dwarven civilization existed beneath that mountain which looked so insignificant from so far. Beneath that insignificant mountain were walls and buildings that looked even more miniscule and lack-significance.

"...time to stop contemplating and walk forward." thought Whitebeard out loud. *I need a good dwarven beer after all this travel*, she thought less loudly. The road in front of her was quite unusual for Gemeinplatz. It was dark, smooth gray tarmacadam, made from a combination of coal tar made as a byproduct of dwarven steelmaking and macadam (crushed stone and sand) made as a byproduct of dwarven mining. Unlike the countless Imperial Highways, the tarmac roads of the dwarves were standing strong despite the countless traders trampling on them. The lone dwarf was soon dwarfed by the thick walls of Aroghlie.

"Halt! Who goes there?" Whitebeard was stopped by an armed dwarf at the gate.

"It's me, the Lord of Trade. I'm returning from a mission to Casamonu." replied Whitebeard. She took out a small stone tablet out from her pocket. "I have the Union's written approval, though, I'm pretty sure you don't need any to let a fellow dwarf in. What's with all the caution?"

"Haven't you heard the news? The Council declared a state of emergency." The guard took the stone tablet and took a quick glance at it. It had a bunch of text written on it about Whitebeard being authorized to act as an ambassador for the Union of Dwarves. "We have to check everyone to make sure that they aren't an elven spy."

“Elven spy? Excuse me, boy, do I look like an elf to you?!” roared Whitebeard. Her small stature seemed much grander when she shouted. So grand, in fact, that she sort of understood how she could be mistaken for an elf.

The guard gave the tablet back. “Who knows, maybe the elves bought you out.”

“Why would any of the elven chiefs send a spy anyways? We haven’t been at war for as long as I and my pa and grandpa remember. None of those tree huggers could break through these walls no matter how many spies they send.” Whitebeard kicked the wall of Aroghlie to make her point. She immediately regretted her decision as she cradled her foot in pain.

The guard scratched his head, which didn’t go well as he just ended up scratching the metal of his helmet. “You really haven’t heard?”

“I’ve been busy travelling all season! It’s been hard to make my way through Casamonu when they’re all paranoid about their slaves. I was interrogated, almost executed right at the start of my journey, and even then, all that was for naught when the lord of Casamonu died and I was stuck for a while waiting for the siege to end so I could get out.”

“...I- I see.” The guard nodded. “Thank you for your service.”

“Anyways, what’s happening with the elves?”

“I don’t really have the details. It’s best if you report to the people at the Supreme Council.”

Whitebeard involuntarily jumped up at the mention of the Supreme Council. “Right! I did go there to... uhm...” she scratched her white beard “...it’s been a whole season. I think it’s a bit late for me to update the Council on the happenings in Casamonu.” Still, she parted with the guard to make her way into the mountain itself. The outdoors of Aroghlie was busy as usual, with resident humans overshadowing her as she passed them by. She passed by a shanty town made out of fugitive slaves, and then through a bunch of trade houses and workshops, before she eventually made her way up to a grand granite archway denoting the entrance to the dwarven parts of Aroghlie. There were two dwarven guards flanking the gate as well. These ones didn’t bother with stopping a fellow dwarf, thankfully. Then came the damnable endless stairs leading into the bowels of the earth.

It took five minutes or so of walking down, which was not appreciated after she had travelled endlessly for so long, to reach the actual Aroghlie down under. Despite being under countless miles of earth, she had no difficulty seeing the environment. The endless furnaces of Aroghlie, fueled by the endless coal of the mountain, made sure that there wasn’t a dark spot in the city. Any human who went down here would find themselves dead from lung cancer in a week. Thankfully, dwarves had lungs as strong as their livers. Whitebeard threw a dime at the nearest beer-dealer she could find, and she soon had finished a pint. Then it was time to make her way to the Supreme Council, which was easy to access as it was built right in the middle of Aroghlie. It was a building, not built from stone bricks like many, but it had simply been carved into the wall. So was its interior, where the stools and grand table inside the Supreme Council were made from carved stone. There, on her seat as the Lord of Trade, was another dwarf that wasn’t her.

“You must be Whitebeard, right?” The dwarf on her seat stood up to salute Whitebeard. “Greetings, I’m the newly elected Lord of Trade, Lady Kyou’mür Barbarossa.” She and Whitebeard shook hands.

“Right, I did miss the elections, didn’t I? Glad to meet you, Lady Barbarossa.” Whitebeard breathed a sigh of relief. She wouldn’t have to deal with the downfall of her failure. “I came a bit late, so I assume you’re already caught up?”

“Yes. A few human refugees arrived and told us about the Siege of Casamonu. I’d still welcome a dwarven account.” Barbarossa sat back down again, and so did Whitebeard.

“Well, it all started when fugitive slaves gathered outside the walls, I was staying at an inn after the count had rejected me. Then...” Whitebeard quickly related all she saw. “...when I was leaving, they were preparing for some sort of election. I didn’t have a chance to meet their leader however; the town was in way too much chaos for me to find a way to. I decided to leave Casamonu before things got tense and I couldn’t leave again.”

“I see.” Barbarossa took a sip from her mug of fine dwarven ale “Have you heard of the high elves?”

“I did hear something about elves, yes, right at the gate. The situation seems to be tense, though I have no idea why and how.” Whitebeard had filled herself up a mug from a keg in the council room.

“You see, while you were away, the Empire decided to strike back. The Imperials, they have given the title of ‘Marchioness of Zon’guldac’ to an elven chief named Tinatin Leafblower.”

“Tinatin who?”

Barbarossa shrugged. “We don’t really know either. She seems to be a minor chieftain, and there isn’t much about her in the archives. Whoever she is, she seems to be an ambitious one if she got such a grand title handed to her.”

“Whoever she is, I wouldn’t expect that from the human’s emperor. He’s always seemed like the young, unambitious type, just like his ancestors before him. You know these mortals, they’re always afraid of making a move lest their short life be cut even shorter. Why would he dare make such a bold move all of a sudden...” Whitebeard drank the last drop in her cup. She stood up to get another pint.

“I wouldn’t be asking this if I knew, would I?” Barbarossa had finished her mug as well. “No matter what the background of this mess is, it’s obvious that the Imperials don’t have the best intentions in mind for Zon’guldac. We’ve already received elven refugees, and they tell us that Leafblower has been conducting an aggressive campaign of unifying the elven tribes. I don’t think it’ll take our dwarven ingenuity to tell where she’ll be heading to after she’s done with unifying the elves.”

“Zon’guldac, yes. I see now.” Whitebeard was pacing around the room, her unease clear.

“The metalheads have already gathered to prepare for a siege. Unfortunately, our situation is, in all honesty, quite dire. It seems that the previous Lords of Defense didn’t expect us to go to war anytime soon, though such matters of warfare aren’t my or your job.” Barbarossa took out an empty stone tablet from her pocket, along with a small, intricately decorated hammer and nail. “Our job is to find whoever we can to help us with the siege. I’ve already sent some ambassadors to our neighbors, though none of them have responded positively. Nothing from the Empire either. Their ambassadors have just told us to surrender to our so-called liege, and our neighbors seem to agree.”

“...have you sent anyone to the League?” asked Whitebeard.

Barbarossa raised her bushy dwarven eyebrow “The League? Do you mean the people that just sieged Casamonu?”

Whitebeard replied with a nod.

“You know, openly siding with fugitive slaves would mean burning all bridges with the Imperials.” said Barbarossa.

“I think the Imperials have already demolished those bridges, Lady Barbarossa.” Whitebeard struck her hammer on the table with anger “By the Deep Ones, the Imperials were already dissatisfied with Zon’guldac being a haven for refugees! If they’re so sure that we’re on the side of the slaves, then we should make their fears come true.”

“You may be right.” concluded Barbarossa “Do you believe that this League can be negotiated with? They are fugitives after all, we don’t know reliable they are.”

“I believe that the League, or the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz as they call themselves now, should be kept close. I’ll only judge their reliability upon meeting their chief, but they can’t be worse than the Empire of Gemeinplatz. I’ll however say that they proved themselves to be excellent warriors during the Siege of Casamonu.”

“It is decided then.” Barbarossa began etching letters on the stone tablet she had earlier taken out. She handed the tablet over to Whitebeard “Since you are the one most familiar with the League, or Republic, you should be the one to negotiate with them.”

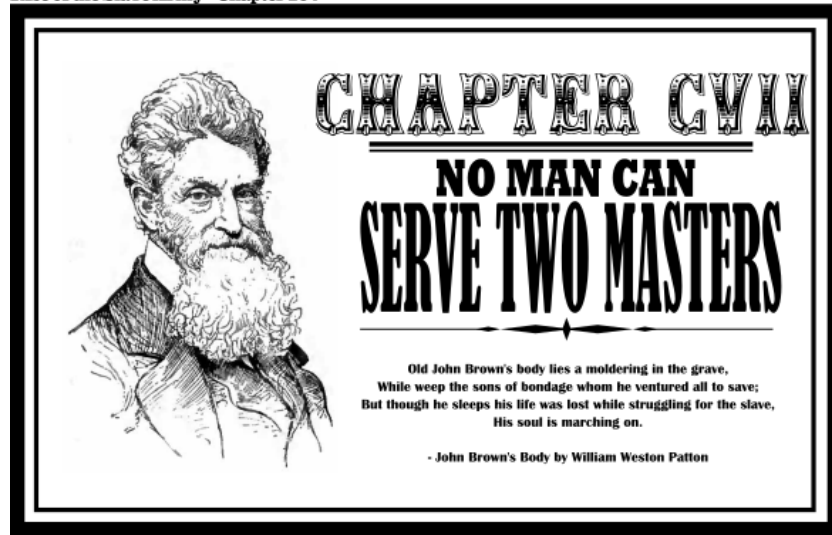
Whitebeard took the stone tablet, which contained new orders assigning her as an ambassador under command of Barbarossa. She honestly wasn’t too excited to travel again, but... “I’ll do what I can.”

“Since the situation is precarious, I’ll get a caravan together to escort you and carry some gifts to the Republic to help lubricate negotiations. Get some rest today, I think you really need it.”

“I agree. I need to lay on a proper dwarven bed for once.” Whitebeard and Barbarossa parted ways, with Whitebeard making sure to take another free pint from the council before leaving. Soon, she’d again be a bit too busy to enjoy dwarven ale.

Chapter 113: Chapter CVII – No man can serve two masters.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 107



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

79th of Summer 5859 Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

“I can’t believe I’m heading to the castle under such circumstances...” muttered Inkwell by himself as he headed up the stairs leading to Castle Casamonu. All his servants, which were just the workers of his printing press, had been seized by his daughter collaborating with the anti-Imperial savages. He was left with neither pomp or circumstance. While Inkwell wasn’t a man obsessed with pomp, the circumstances didn’t please him at all. Up and up he went on his own two feet ‘till he was at the tippy top of the hill. The red brick of the castle greeted him through the gates.

Also through the gates was a whole load of sheep, and men sat around the sheep. One familiar old man was standing, giving a lecture while holding a bucket of liquid. He was standing next to a pit with stone walls. “...now, let me tell you with all honesty: none of you know how to process wool properly. Nor do you know how to properly take care of your flock! Look at this-” Brown walked towards one sheep. It had maggots wriggling around its eyes, so did a few of its comrades in sheephood. He patted the head of the sheep gently as if petting a newborn kitten. Then he took out a brush from the bucket of liquid and smacked some liquid around the eyes of the sheep. Soon a few maggots dropped dead on the ground. “Treating grubs is this simple, gentlemen. Instead of smoking tobacco, you should boil it in some water like this and use it to treat your flock for once. I don’t want to see any infested sheep running around town again, got it? Let all your shepherd acquaintances know.”

The crowd of sitting men around Brown were busy taking mental notes when Inkwell had finally approached Brown. “Brown-”

Brown raised a finger to his lips. “Ssh. I’m not done here. Take a seat, maybe you’ll learn something as well.” Inkwell stared at the old man in sheer astonishment, wondering whether he had gone insane to go down to the level of shepherds as the so-called leader, but he was eventually intimidated by Brown’s miffed gaze to stand down. After his guest was forcibly inducted into his lecture, Brown jumped down to the stone pit he had set up. His head peaked out from below the

ground while he spoke, and a few of the shepherds approached the man and his pit out of curiosity. “Now, this is an ashery. Collect yourself some bracken, or some birch wood, and burn it in one of these.” He had already placed all items needed to demonstrate them to the crowd while talking. Brown raised a plate of ashes from the pit to show to the shepherds.

“Sir, we already know how to make ash...” replied one of the shepherds. “Why’d you want a bunch of ash? Are we making soap? What’s that got to do with sheep?”

“Patience! It’s got everything to do with sheep.” Brown then raised a cauldron filled with quicklime in water. “Now, get some quicklime which we have plenty of in the mountains together with the ash. Boil them together, add some fat and...” The old man raised a particularly fine bar of soap that he had made. “...soap! Now, this is only the beginning. I asked you to bring samples of your best wool. Could one of you hand me a sample?”

One of the shepherds handed Brown a lump of unclean, greasy wool. Brown looked at it as if it was the Devil. “Is this really the best you have? Would you dare sell this at the market?”

“It’s the tailor’s job to clean the wool. We don’t really bother with cleaning it.” said the shepherd who handed the wool. “Don’t know how to clean wool anyways.”

“Then you’ll learn. See this?” Brown took out a pile of wool that he had cleaned beforehand. He had stuffed it in his pocket for today. “Now, imagine you’re at the market and looking to buy wool. Which one would you buy: this mangy, greasy piece, or this clean piece? Wouldn’t you be willing to pay extra for a bundle that looks to be of way higher quality?”



The shepherds around him were nodding, looking at the fluffy, pure white piece of wool that Brown was holding. It looked as if the old man had flown and stolen a cloud from the heavens. “As you can see, making some soap is very simple. Get the grease off the wool by washing it with some soap, washing your sheep before shearing would be even better, and it’ll look as soft as a cloud. The Republic has abolished any guild-related restrictions that may cause you trouble if you make some for yourself. Spend time keeping your sheep healthy and clean your wool, and I assure you that you’ll have yourself some premium wool that the people in the market will clamor to buy.” With Brown having finished his lecture in the courtyard, the shepherds dissolved and took their sheep. Now, only Brown and Inkwell remained.

“W-what was that?” suddenly exclaimed Inkwell “Why do we have shepherds in the castle?!”

Brown pocketed the soft wool that he had taken out before “You see Mister Inkwell: I was wandering around the town market yesterday. My socks went completely bust, so I wanted to buy some wool to make a new pair.”

Inkwell scratched his head. “...you make your own socks? Can’t you see a tailor?”

“Why spend money on a tailor when I can make my own pair?” answered Brown. For a second he thought whether or not he should take off his socks then and then to show off how snazzy they looked, but he quickly realized how awkward that’d be. “Ahem! To get back on point, I found that the quality of wool was lacking in Casamonu. That turned into an argument with the seller, and it ended up with him daring me to show how I could get ‘this mangy fur’ into shape. After I delivered this specimen here” he raised up the fluffy pile of wool still in his hands “the man was sufficiently convinced. That apparently resulted in my name spreading around the shepherds, so I took this opportunity to invite them for a lecture.”

“Uhm... yeah.” Inkwell sufficed by idly nodding. He didn’t really get why a man, who now ruled an entire county, would care about a bunch of shepherds running around the place. “I can’t believe Casamonu fell to an ex-shepherd...”

“Ex? I’d still consider myself to be a shepherd, I’ve been one since my youth herding my father’s sheep, though I’ll admit that I lack sheep at the moment. Next week the shepherds agreed to bring their flocks, so that I can inspect and buy the finest sheep that they have.” Brown grasped Inkwell by the shoulder, holding him close “Imagine: The finest bred sheep in Gemeinplatz! No longer shall the wool growers be held down by their emaciated, sickly sheep! I-”

Inkwell escaped from Brown’s grip. “Mister Brown, don’t get close to me. I’m just here for business.”

Brown’s hand remained in the hair for a minute before he exited his sheeplike trance. “Excuse me, I was caught up in excitement. Ahem – congratulations on your victory, Mayor Inkwell.”

Mayor Inkwell seemed taken aback by the amicable reception. “I thought I’d be hanging from a tree like all the other men of nobility. Are you toying with me?”

“No, we only executed those who committed crimes against the Lord by chaining men in captivity” replied Brown “You didn’t have any slaves, no?”

Inkwell shook his head “No. Printing is a skilled business, so slaves would have been quite useless.”

“Then, you have nothing to fear, unless you are plan on going on a tirade like you did with your speech. A mayor who’s well-versed in the goings on of Casamonu is welcome.” Brown had been disappointed with his candidate not winning, and surprised that victory had come despite the overwhelming rural vote, but the Almighty definitely had a plan if He had let him win.

“You are a lunatic.” Inkwell heaved a deep sigh “A real lunatic. I sincerely hope that Imperial order will be restored soon.”

“If you sincerely hoped that, you’d have made your way out of Casamonu to an Imperial settlement. In fact, you are free to do so – we won’t stop you. Change is frightening, Mister Inkwell, but I believe you’ll come to like it here.”

“I’ll just do my best to protect Casamonu from your lunacy” concluded Inkwell. He left Brown without even giving a proper farewell.

Ayomide, having been watching from behind a nearby tree, popped out behind Brown. “Captain, is it a good idea to leave this man be?”

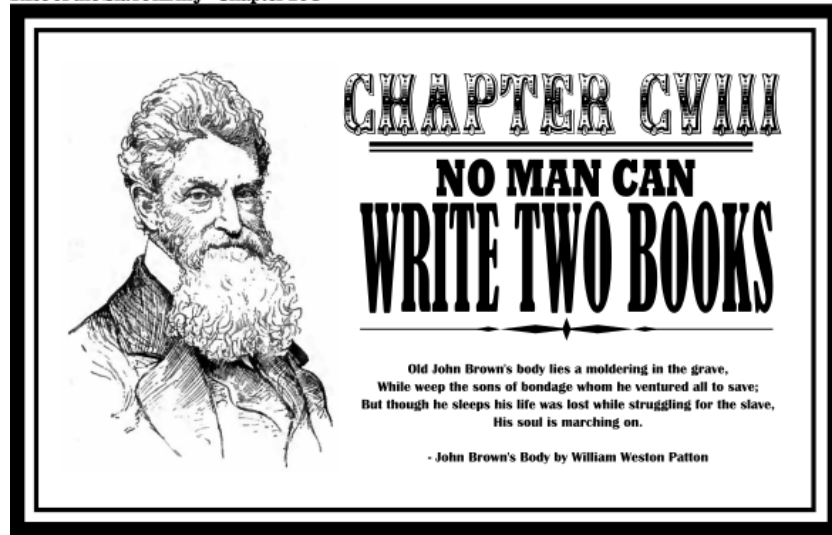
“No, but not leaving him be won’t solve anything. Inkwell is a symptom, not the disease.” Brown pocketed the pile of wool he was still holding. “Even if we, using honest words, rigged odds against him he won fairly. The solution is to make it so that the people of Casamonu will *learn* why men like him aren’t a good idea. Otherwise, the moment we’re gone, an Inkwell by another name will take absolute control.”

“How do you plan on doing that? Gemeinplatz has had a very long time to learn, you know.”

“We either find a way to do that, or we’ll all wallow in ignorance and kill each other to extinction. May Providence guide us to an amicable end.” Brown took a step towards the castle “Now, let’s try to make things right. I have a few ideas.”

Chapter 114: Chapter CVIII – No man can write two books.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 108



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

86th of Summer 5859 In front of a building, Casamonu

Shakira stood in front of a building, one that stood inconspicuous due to being overshadowed by the castle above it. She vaguely remembered passing in front of this building several times, though she had never bothered to learn what it exactly was. It didn't look that important, and she had no idea as to why the receptionist over at the guild had called her saying that an "important person" was waiting for her. Shakira instinctively dusted off her dress, an out-of-fashion piece that she had bought second-hand with the money she had received from carrying goods for the League. It was off-color, it had a few tears she'd have to sew together, and the massive sword she had on her back made her look more threatening than fashionable. She knocked on the door of the building, holding her breath and hoping that she wasn't about to be kidnapped by a bunch of mobsters who had led her to a trap.

"Hm? Oh, hello Shakira!" Azra Inkwell jumped out the door and hugged Shakira. Shakira, in turn, awkwardly mumbled a greeting. She was doing her best not to move around and accidentally cut Azra's arms in twain with the comically enormous sword on her back.

"H-hello- get off me, girl." Shakira gently pushed Azra away. "Be careful, you'll get cut by my sword."

"Oh yes, the adventurer and her sword." Azra nodded while taking a twirl around Shakira and examining her "A true adventurer can't part ways with it even when she's coming over for a visit, no?"

"Uhm..." Shakira examined Azra "Don't people normally carry weapons?"

Azra shook her head. She took out a small, well-embellished dagger from the folds of her dress and showed it to Shakira. "I don't think most people carry anything beyond this inside of a city."

“Oh, right... I guess constantly being in the middle of wild adventurers did make me forget that not everyone carries weaponry everywhere.” Shakira unstrapped her enormous blade and let it lean on the walls.

“That’s so cool!” Shakira could practically see Azra’s eyes light up “That’s why I called you here, because I want to hear some stories of your adventures.”

“...really? Girl, I don’t have the time to dilly-dally with you.”

“Come on, I have drinks and pastries and-”

“Guess I can entertain you.” Shakira let herself be dragged further indoors. The inside of the building was pretty noisy, where presses of some kind were being operated by a group of workers. Shakira had seen olive and wine presses before, and she wondered what sort of drink they were trying to make by pressing paper. “What are they making over there?” she pointed at the presses.

“Printing.” replied Azra.

“Printing? What’s that?”

Azra took hold of a finished pile of bound paper “Copying prints, making these? Do you really not now...” she asked, her face dropping both in disappointment and in awe of Shakira’s ignorance.

“Words aren’t for me, girl. All the knowledge I need to live is stored here.” Shakira flexed the muscles on her arm with the content smile of someone who lacks brain muscles.

“Wow, that’s cool!” Azra couldn’t help but clap “So, tea or coffee?”

“Uh, no beer?”

“Drinking while operating heavy machinery isn’t a good idea, Miss Shakira.”

Shakira’s face dropped. She was disappointed at not having free booze “Hmm... Coffee, I guess. I’ve never seen or tasted it.”

“Despite having traveled so much?”

“It’s expensive, okay?” Shakira paused to let Azra have a good look at her getup. “I don’t have the money to spend on fancy drinks.”

“I guess. It is imported from the far, far North...” Azra quickly poured a cup of brown, strong-smelling liquid from an odd brass cup that was sitting on a table along with pots for tea and cups. She sat them on a separate table which was mostly occupied by papers and writing implements. Shakira and Azra sat on stools sat across to each other on the table.

“*Slurp- puah!*” Shakira coughed violently upon her first drop of coffee “This is how I imagine mud would taste like!”

“It’s definitely a taste you have to get used to for sure.” Azra’s head was turned to the print workers in the meanwhile. They had decided to take a break too upon seeing their boss sit down.

“I think I’d rather not get used to this.” Shakira sat the cup of coffee down. She followed Azra’s gaze to the workers “So, what kind of stuff are you printing with these doohickeys?”

“We’ve just been printing the Constitution and land grants for now.” Azra separated herself from the stool and stood up “Though, we’ll be getting a lot of work soon.”

“Hm? What, are they going to make you print another constipation, uh, constellation... const... constwhatever again?”

“No, they want some textbooks.”

Shakira scratched her hair “Don’t all books contain text?”

Azra couldn’t help but laugh “No- I mean, yes, they do, but no, as in that a textbook doesn’t refer to a book with text... I mean, okay, it is a book with text but...” She had to pause for a long minute to regain her ability to speak “Ahem, let me show you what those will be like.” She squeezed through the printing presses towards a door, and Shakira followed behind her. In the other room were a bunch of people gathered around on a table, with papers strewn all over the table and the floor.

A shout came from an otherworlder with jet black hair. Why math? Do you want to torture these people?!” Watanabe knocked on a piece of paper with fury “By the gods, I still have nightmares due to my college mathematics classes!”

“Knowing your numbers is important, Watanabe.” Rabanowicz shooed the man away from the papers “Do not take your anger out on the paper. It took me several hours to write down those problems.”

“Oh, I get it, you’re a sadist. A normal person wouldn’t spend several hours on penning down problems that’ll potentially torture people for generations...” Watanabe overdramatically covered his face with his hands “O’, the humanity!”

“I have no need to hear the ramblings of an ignoramus while I’m working. Shoo now, go chase some tail or whatever you do.” Rabanowicz turned to an old man who was busy writing on another desk in the room “Captain Brown, could you tell him to calm down?”

Brown raised his head up. He looked annoyed to have been parted from his passion project. “Young man, mathematics is the foundation to all sciences. Please don’t interrupt Doctor Rabanowicz because you are unable to comprehend that fact.” He noticed their guests “Oh, Miss Azra. Excuse us for the commotion.”

“Don’t worry, captain – we can barely hear anything from a room over with all the presses running” replied Azra. “I brought a friend over, since she was curious about what you were working on.”

“Well, I wasn’t really curious. I was just confused” said Shakira.

“You’re welcome as long as you’re ready to learn” replied Brown “We’re here preparing manuscripts for the soon-to-be elementary schools.”

“School... elementary... those two are words I know.” Shakira nodded with a modicum of understanding.

“To put it simply, we’ll be setting up public schools to educate the populace in elementary matters. Hence, an elementary school, and we need teaching material for these schools, hence the textbooks being written by Dr. Rabanowicz and Mr. Watanabe.” Brown finished a line of text on his desk. “As for me, I’m putting together an agriculture textbook.”

“Agriculture? Ain’t that for the peasants? Can they even read? What good will it do to educate those boonies folk?” asked Shakira.

“Ideally, they’ll all know to read in a few months, though we can have teachers teach from the textbook even if their students don’t know to read. As for what good they’ll do, I’d say its obvious: The rural folk doing a better job means that we have less of a chance to all starve. Plus, having cheaper and a higher variety of food wouldn’t be bad, no? I think our homesteading program will do great in combination with educated farmers and...” In the middle of Brown’s speech, everyone in the room began tuning out as the old man began ranting about his experience in trying to pioneer Timbuctoo, New York. How inexperienced settlers had been unable to adapt to the conditions, and how the land had turned out barren and unfit for settling in the first place. His account of the events went for way too long. “...which is why, I think, that such education should be given foremost. We’ll be giving an extra land grant to those who have gotten this fundamental education.”

“Oh, um, yes...” Shakira nodded as if she understood all of it.

“...ah yeah.” Watanabe nodded along as well. He had given up on listening and was assisting Rabanowicz on their textbook. “We’re doing a similar thing, just for a wider set of elementary skills. Like, this chapter on natural science about the fact that the world is round.”

“Huh... It’s round? I guess that makes sense.” replied Shakira. “I don’t really know what good that’ll do either.”

“Knowledge makes you stronger, miss.” added Rabanowicz. “An imbecilic muscleman can easily be defeated by a scrawny genius.”

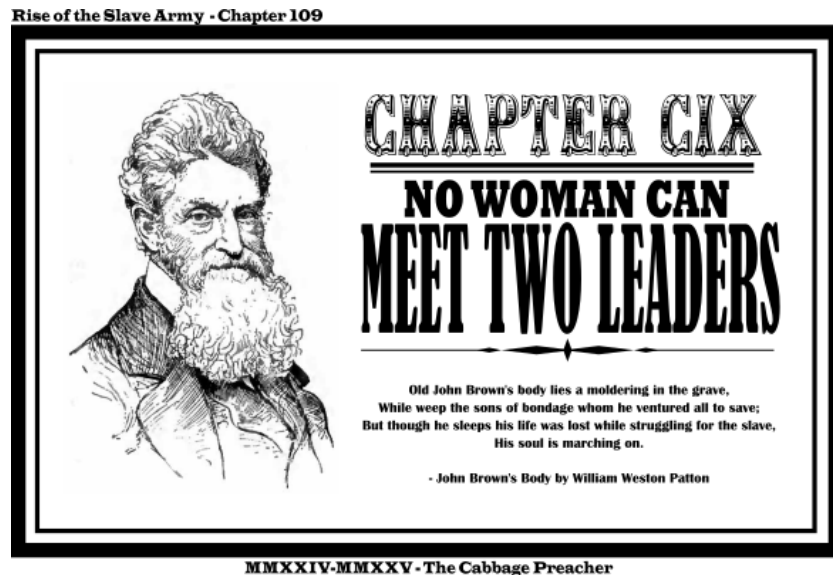
“It makes you stronger?” Shakira looks at her arms. They sure could use getting even stronger... “Though, I don’t have money to join these schools. I hear that the noble folk pay top money to educate their children, so it must be expensive.”

“We’ll be having an announcement for registrations soon. Worry not – these schools are public. Anyone can join them, though unfortunately, I doubt we’ll have enough infrastructure to accept everyone in at once.” replied Brown “The textbooks we’ll distribute to students freely. I think the investment we make will be well enough worth it with the returns that we’ll make when the people of Gemeinplatz are well-educated.”

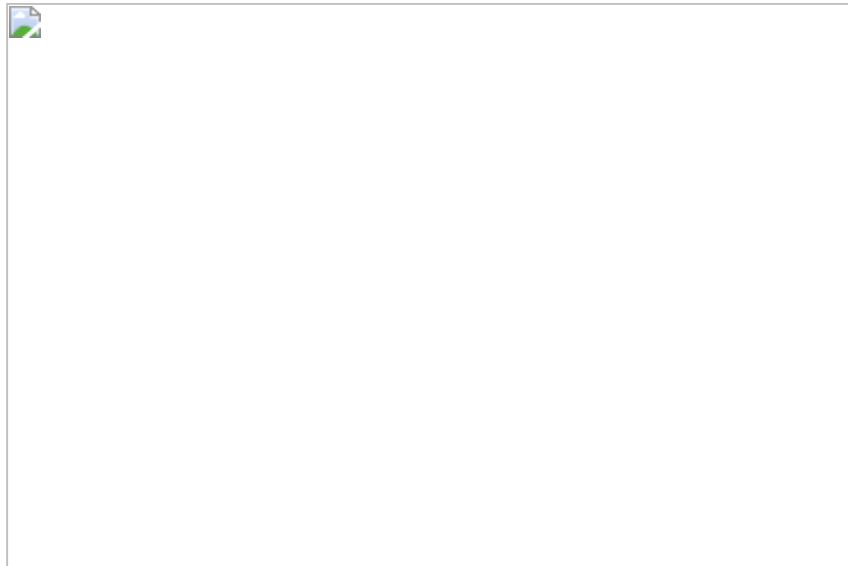
“Hmm...” Shakira took a look at the textbooks with their fancy-looking writing. Writing like that would be so cool, wouldn’t it, or so she thought.

It seemed that Brown had already found his first student.

Chapter 115: Chapter CIX – No woman can meet two leaders.



1st of Autumn 5859
An indistinct field outside the city, Casamonu



Today was the first day of Autumn. Long gone were the green leaves, for they had grown tired of idly standing around for the last few months. Now the leaves were taking a wee break on the ground. They were covered in the morning dew served to them directly by the humid air.

Whitebeard was intently watching the leaves pass by. They reminded her of bronze leaves flattened on an anvil, especially with how they glistered. She, on the back of a carriage, had planted herself as firm as a rock on a seat.

“Here it is, miss.” The carriage driver pointed at an indistinct blur over yonder “It’s Casamonu.”

“It better be. I paid you good money” replied Whitebeard. Finding a driver willing to venture forth into the lair of the fugitives and their so-called Demon King was a challenge which only money could solve. “I can recognize the place. It hasn’t been long since I came here.”

“Did you escape during the siege?” asked the driver.

“I did, after the siege.” Whitebeard, of course, wouldn’t reveal her methods. A lady always kept her secrets close - secrets like the fact that she conducted business with that shady Ayda fellow.

“You’ll be surprised at the lucrative opportunities here, miss. I’ve been making good libra on bringing whatever I can get from the neighboring towns. There are no customs guards or anything of the sort with the new people here.”

“Is that so?” Whitebeard took out her hammer and poked its cold metal handle to the neck of the man, causing him to shudder “I thought you were charging a premium due to how dangerous the route was. It seems that I was mistaken.”

“Uh- I- I’ll give you a refund on the premium, miss.” The driver let out a sigh of relief when the handle was retracted from his back.

“Pleasure doing business with you.” Whitebeard put her hammer back to its place, the empty seat right next to her, and continued enjoying the scenery. She saw fields filled with peasants who had probably immediately gone back to work after the siege kerfuffle was over. Unusual to her were the variation in the skin colors of these peasants. There were groups of newly-minted peasants who seemed to work a bit away from the veteran peasants out of caution. A majority of these new peasants were working on the construction of new domiciles for themselves. Scattered around were the occasional men in blue gambeson armed with spears. Whitebeard saw one in the distance standing between an old and a new peasant arguing with each other. She had seen the same uniforms when she had peeked out the walls out of curiosity during the siege. Closer to the city was a small collection of upcoming peasant huts which had a signpost in front declaring it to be “the village of New Libertycave”. Whitebeard looked around her and encountered no caves, confusing her greatly. On the other side of the road was another collection of huts which were similarly ensigned “the fair village of Newer Libertycave” on a nearby signpost. Again, there was no cave to be found nearby.

Before any more Libertycaves could pop up, Whitebeard found herself in front of the gate of Casamonu. Not much had changed, save for the wall right next to the gate containing a gaping hole leftover from the siege. There wasn’t much traffic, so the driver stopped right before the gate. “This is where you should get off, miss.”

“Refund.” Whitebeard reached out to her hammer. Thankfully, she was refunded before she had to resort to more aggressive negotiation methods “Thank you.” She hopped off the carriage and watched as it disappeared into the gates. Now it was time for her to gain entrance too. She halted the two blue-uniformed guards in front of the gate “Good morning, gentlemen.”

“Lady,” replied the guard on the left “Are you blind? Do I look like a man to you?”

“Excuse me, all you humans look the same to me” replied Whitebeard with a shrug.

The guard on the right took on the job of her companion “So, what business does a dwarf have in Casamonu? We don’t have many visitors nowadays.”

“Diplomatic business.” Whitebeard took out the stone tablet with her job description inscribed on it. “I’d like to meet your leader, if that is possible.”

“The Captain... or, well, the Commander-in-Chief?” The right guard paused to think for a second “To tell you the truth, he might be anywhere. You should be able to find him by asking around, or you can wait at the castle until he returns.”

“Huh.” Whitebeard wondered what sort of odd creature this so-called Commander-in-Chief was. “Have a nice day.” She went through the gate, which was another oddity. Usually she’d have to pay some sort of tax at least to go through a city’s gate.

Entering the city, Whitebeard observed her surroundings to see not much of note, which was of much note in itself. The city was intact, save for uncleaned rubble left over from the wall’s collapse. While she hadn’t witnessed a city’s fall firsthand, Whitebeard had heard and read that conquering armies would often indulge in the spoils of victory. The people of Casamonu however, while clearly tense, didn’t look worse off than last time. In fact, they looked much better than the starving faces she had during the siege. The only immediately noticeable difference was that the uniform of the city guard had changed color to the standard blue, and of course, the colors of the guards themselves had a whole lot more variation. She could hear the cries of the town crier from far away:

“...not forget to apply for free elementary schooling starting next month! Those who attend the agriculture course will have priority for being granted land according to the Homesteading Act...”

Whitebeard knew not what all those fancy words meant, but she could see their effects clearly as she passed by a brightly decorated stand set by the side of the road. There was an official and a guard at the stand who were attending a snaking line of people. The sign on top of the stand read “Apply for the Casamonu National Guard and defend your city: guaranteed food and drink.” She passed by the stand and started making her way up to the castle as she had before.

The road going up the hill was quite arduous, though it was nothing compared to the entrance to her dwarven home city. After a few minutes and a showing of the stone tablet to the guards, Whitebeard was once again inside the courtyard of Casamonu Castle. She saw a huge line of soldiers. They were comprised of pairs with one blue-uniformed soldier and one familiar yellow-uniformed soldier. Overwatching all these pairs was a blue-uniformed catgirl who seemed to have some sort of authority due to how she was shouting at them “Get your weapons straight! You ain’t national guarding anything with that weak grip; watch the veterans carefully!”

“Excuse me.” Whitebeard let out one loud and diplomatic cough to get attention “Would you happen to know where the Commander-in-Chief is?”

“Continue training.” The catgirl gave one last command before turning back to face Whitebeard “I may, depending on who you are.”

“I am Lady Whitebeard, a diplomat sent over by the Supreme Council.” She tried to hand over her stone tablet, but the catgirl didn’t seem too interested in ineligible writing.

“A diplomat? The old man says those are always welcome here.” The catgirl shouted towards a group of shepherds who were also occupying the courtyard “Old man! We’ve got a dwarf!”

A guy who fit the description of “old man” separated from the group of shepherds and ran towards Whitebeard. His beard wasn’t as great as Whitebeard’s of course, but she still couldn’t help but nod

with respect and approval upon witnessing the human with great facial hair.

“Welcome, good sir” shouted out the old man.

“Lady. *Lady* Whitebeard, at your service.” replied Whitebeard.

“Oh, excuse me Lady Whitebeard. Apologies, for this is the first time I’ve seen a dwarf in person.”

“So, do you know who and where the Commander-in-Chief is?” asked Whitebeard. She was confused as to why this catgirl officer needed to call a shepherd to resolve the situation.

“I know him. He’s me.” The old man pointed at himself “John Brown, at your service.”

Whitebeard debated whether or not to take her warhammer out and quash any semblance of diplomacy under it “It’s not funny. I’m here on official business, and I need to meet your leader.”

“He’s not trying to be funny. The old man is the Commander-in-Chief, though most prefer to refer to him as a captain. If you’ll excuse me – I have a National Guard to attend to.” Ayomide left the scene, leaving John Brown and Whitebeard alone.

Whitebeard took a good look, from bottom to top, at the old man in front of her. His boots were muddy, his pants were clearly patched up, his jacket was a simple leather piece, and his hair was about as well-done as a shepherd’s. “Please take no offence, but I was expecting a man who sieged this city to look... a bit grander.”

Brown laughed at the dwarf’s statement. “Oh, maybe I should don the clothes of the late count if that’ll help visitors.” He cleaned his throat “On a more serious note, I’m here as a temporarily appointed servant and a fellow citizen of the Republic. I think this is about as fancily as anyone should dress: any more is a waste.”

“I see.” Whitebeard was surprised to see a method behind the madness “Then, let me get on with my duty. I’ll repay you the favor and be as clear as you were: Aroghlie requires the copper of Mount Curry, and I believe your Republic will require the coal and iron of Mount Zon’guldac.”

Brown scratched his beard “I’m guessing you’re here because of the latest proclamation of the Empire. We happened to intercept copies of it when we captured the city.”

Whitebeard nodded “Excellent, we can spare some time on the briefing then. The Supreme Council definitely don’t plan on calling for human military help in our affairs, so all I’ll ask for is assurance that dwarven goods will be welcome in your territory as they were welcomed before in Casamonu.”

“Of course. The dwarves have helped many fugitives, as I’ve heard, so your goods will be more than welcome. More than that – I’d be grateful if you could find some experts in steelworking and let them know that we’re hiring. With such help I may be able to convince the folk up in Mount Curry to give the dwarves priority and better prices.”

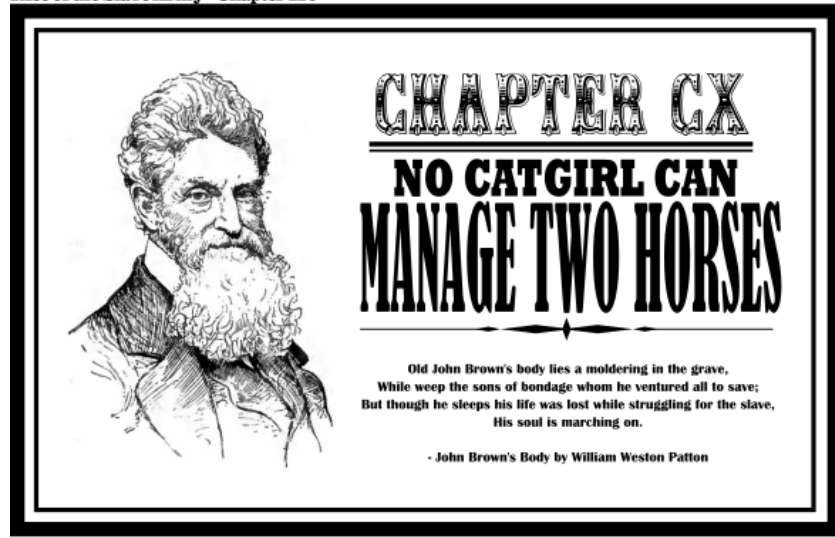
“It’ll be impossible for me to send anyone over with any dwarven trade secrets, but we have expert non-dwarven steelworkers who I’m sure would be happy to find work in somewhere with less competition.” Whitebeard extended her hand “So, do we have a deal? We dwarves like our negotiations short and sweet.”

“We have a deal, good lady.”

Brown and Whitebeard shook hands, tying the fate of the dwarves to that of the Republic.

Chapter 116: Chapter CX – No catgirl can manage two horses.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 110



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher



4th of Autumn 5859
Imperial Highway №04-030, Casamonu

There was a procession of yellow out in Casamonu. An observer far away wouldn't be mistaken in mistaking this for a procession of giant newborn chicks, from the way they waddled and wobbled all together en masse. However, most unfortunately for some, giant chicks were not a thing in Casamonu.

“Move out people, these roads aren’t fixing themselves!” Ayomide was on a donkey which was carrying along a cart of provisions on its back. The cart was making hellish clattering while on the road. An absence of regular maintenance had certainly hit the highway hard. On the road Ayomide had seen missing milestones, some knocked over and most looted. In place were the corpses of pack animals and the occasional person who had perished during the chaos in Casamonu.

“What a dismay this sight is. Poor people...” Rabanowicz had made herself a spot on the cart. She was holding a small notebook filled with notes. In front of her was a spread out a map of the area, a somewhat crude one detailing and numbering all the roads, on a crate of food.

“Believe me, enslavement was a whole lot more of a dismay.” Ayomide scoffed. Her mood certainly wasn’t better when she had been travelling on a bumpy road with a donkey.

“I wasn’t saying that your situation was any better, Madame Ayomide. One can care about and feel somber over more than one matter at once.” Rabanowicz looked around, spotting a milestone. “We should stop here: we’re at the part that the Republic will be responsible for fixing.”

“Aye aye, captain. Everyone, set up camp!” Captain Ayomide stopped the donkey. Everyone else in the yellow procession stopped alongside her. She hopped off the donkey, and Rabanowicz followed with papers in hand.

“Ahem. If I may have your attention, gentlemen.” The National Guard gathered around Rabanowicz. “Imperial Highway №04-030 is a critical connecting point between Zon’guldac and Casamonu, one which has fallen into disrepair over the years. Therefore, the Council has authorized the use of the National Guard in this emergency situation to repair infrastructure. You’ll of course be paid and fed during this assignment.” There was yawning coming from the crowd, though they weren’t complaining about getting to sit down after all that travel. “Thanks to Madame Whitebeard, we have gotten the details on dwarven road laying techniques. I’ve manufactured all the measurements we’ll need to properly construct these roads...”

Ayomide poked Rabanowicz, and then pushed her aside. “Basically, we’re repairing this road, it’s important, and we need your help. Do as Forewoman Rabanowicz tells you to, and Casamonu, along with you all, will prosper. Got it? Now get busy setting up camp, and then laying the road. After you’re done, we have drinks for you to enjoy.” Much to Rabanowicz’s dismay, the road workers were a whole lot more enthusiastic when faced with the simple and quick explanation. Especially the last part, which caused clapping and shouting in suitably celebratory fashion.

Work quickly started on the camp as the donkeys and their carts were emptied. Out from the empty carts sprung beds, tents, and even a wagon fort. Not as quickly as the League would have done it, but Ayomide still found herself pleased by the performance.

“Ahem. If I may have your attention, gentlemen.” Rabanowicz took out a ruler, on which there were no marks except for on the very bottom. It seemed to be way oversized for its purpose. “Do you see this mark here? We’re to dig this deep.”

One of the workers protested “But miss, that’s no deeper than the tip of my finger! Won’t the road just turn into mud?”

“Yeah, I’ve been called upon for corvée work at another highway a few times, and they made us dig pretty deep. Something about water needing to drain out with the rain.” replied another worker.

“Yes, we’ll be digging up soil from around the road to raise the surface of the road by a similar amount first. Basically, make sure that the center of the road is higher than its edges to ensure what the dwarves call ‘drainage’ After that, we’ll start with a layer of crushed stone, and then a thinner layer of even finer crushed stone. You’ll be hammering the stone in the carts and weighing them on the scales I brought along to make sure they’re the correct weight and size.”

The former roadworker from before protested once more “That’ll somehow make a good road? I believe the dwarves may just be making fun of us. That sounds way too simple.”

Ayomide interjected “Either we go with the traditional method of making roads and dig deep like you’ve said, or we go with the dwarven method and you all do less work. Either way you’re getting paid and fed the same, right?”

“Yeah...” All the workers around the protestor seemed ready to beat him up if he protested and made them do more work.

Rabanowicz continued “Not to mention, Captain Brown has stated that he’s seen similar methods used back home to make roads. In fact, he was the one who pushed the dwarven delegate to cooperate on this infrastructure project.”

“The old man loves his infrastructure, maybe as much as he loves his sheep” added Ayomide. “Enough talk, it’s time for work!” She took out a shovel from one of the carts, and the National Guard followed their provisional captain in breaking ground. Work went swiftly, with a strip of raised earth about eight centimeters tall making its debut soon enough. Then the strip of raised earth lost its defining quality with only its edges remaining raised while the rest of it was dug down twenty-five centimeters deep. Shovels were exchanged with hammers as workers broke down stones into fashionably small chunks smaller than eight centimeters in diameter. After the first twenty centimeters of road was filled, the workers switched to even smaller stones no more than 2 centimeters in diameter.



Thus lay a strip of road, a meter wide at the moment, that defied the conventions of roadbuilding in Gemeinplatz. It was a whole lot shallower, and a whole lot simpler than the layers and layers of rock and gravel that the original imperial road beneath it was.

Ayomide looked at the road beneath her feet. She didn't understand infrastructure one bit, but she did find the road suitable for walking on. What she understood was that it was getting dark, so she shouted "Alright everyone, from tomorrow on get yourselves busy with continuing to upgrade the Imperial highway until Casamonu." She breathed a sigh of relief. Tomorrow she'd return back to Casamonu now that her job, enlisting a bunch of National Guard members for the infrastructure project, was done.

Soon the wagon fort was set alight with a fire in the middle as the tired workers began to cook their meals and make merry with beer. Talk centered around what they'd do after they were paid generously for their work in the National Guard. "You know, my neighbor has been doing a terrible job with his shop. I think I'll have saved up enough to buy his place out."

"Eh? You're no fun. I'm going to hit up all the nunneries in Casamonu with his money!"

"All those nunneries will hit you back if you do that. Ever heard of syphilis?"

"No, what is it?"

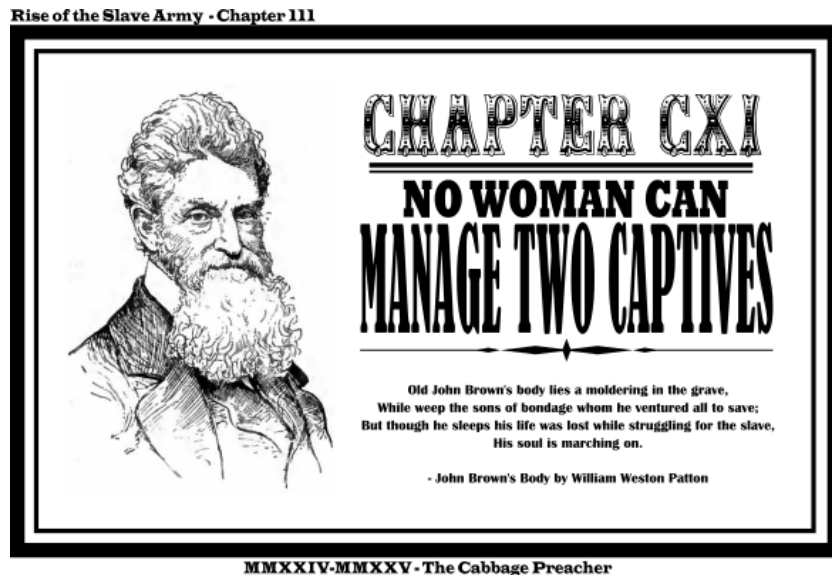
Ayomide had escaped to just outside the wagon fort for a walk. It was pitch dark, but thankfully her eyes could see in the dark just fine. It was quite nice and breezy, the smell of wet earth still fresh, definitely a much better time than summer. All was quite, save for the clapping of hooves... *clapping*? Her ears perked up. It wasn't coming from the direction of the wagon fort. In fact, those claps were coming from the opposite direction. Looking through the dark, Ayomide saw two horsemen. They both had fur hats with a metal band on top, supported by a metal lamellar cuirass backed by a thick fur coat. To Ayomide they looked strange, and alien to the usual horsemen she saw in Gemeinplatz. She couldn't identify their colors, which was in the shape of a simple blue-red tabard on top of their cuirasses. Clearly, they came from somewhere as all people do, but from where? Not with good intentions, Ayomide thought to be most likely, for the pair were approaching the wagon fort in the dark with their recurve bows in hand. Still, she got within magic distance, and hailed the cavalry "Halt, who are you? I come in peace if you do so too."

The cavalymen were startled, and drew their bows towards her direction. Two arrows came towards Ayomide, but deflecting them with a bit of wind was no hard work for her. The two riders immediately turned to gallop, thought not before Ayomide shot a gust of wind strong enough to knock one rider down. She chose to focus on the one she downed, taking a dagger out and pinning the man down. "Yield." Her enemy said something incomprehensible, and lacking a weapon, he had no choice but to stop struggling and surrender.

"I've got someone here! Help me take them back!" shouted Ayomide towards the wagon fort. Her voice was heard as clear as day in the deadly silence of the night, and soon a few of the National Guard arrived to help carry their guest back.

It seemed that Ayomide now had a surprise return gift for the people back in Casamonu.

Chapter 117: Chapter CXI – No woman can manage two captives.



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

5th of Autumn 5859
Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

John Brown had once again made himself busy in his office. There was a whole lot more work to do now that he was managing a whole lot more people: wages, food, the military... As it turns out, managing a state was a whole lot more complex than managing a warband.

At least things seemed to be going well in the Republic. Mayor Bilal, the former foreman of Libertycave, had sent a report on how the reclamation of the copper mines were going. The copperworkers had set up a whole new smelting complex just to process the copper from abandoned mines up in Mount Curry. The craftsmen of Azdavay were content with the flow of copper, and they had already sent their first shipments of copperwork to Zon'guldac to restart trade.

Brown turned the page, to a report on Casamonu by Rabanowicz. It was a very detailed breakdown of the city's food stocks and estimated production. For now, as agriculture had been disrupted for a while and this year's harvest had been insufficient due to that, Casamonu was surviving on food taken from the granaries of the surrounding villages (the food stocks of Casamonu city had been eradicated during the siege). Thankfully, with expanded production from the Homesteading Act and emancipation of the serfs, it seemed that agricultural production would catch up by next year and a Casamonu-wide famine would be avoided.

On the last page was a report on the army of the Republic. The League of Gileadites had recovered back to a thousand men, while the National Guard in Casamonu and Libertycave had gone up to a hundred members each. Both of the National Guard units had been called up to work on infrastructure, with the Casamonu branch working on repairing the Zon'guldac-Casamonu highway while the Libertycave branch worked on constructing a new highway from Libertycave to Casamonu. Brown hoped that, with dwarven trade, the army would finally be able to get equipment better than that used in ancient times. Pure copper equipment had proven brittle with the humid air of Casamonu causing spears and helmets to rust away. Brown didn't feel comfortable going on

another military campaign until they at least had spears that wouldn't bend or rust at a moment's notice.

With that, Brown closed the pile of papers and leaned back on the chair. His old spine was aching from sitting and reading for so long. He was about to get up and stretch his legs when he heard a knock on the door. "Please, come in."

"Old man, I'm back, and I've got a surprise gift for you." Ayomide entered the room, dragging in the intruder she had caught on the highway.

Brown jumped up from his seat in surprise. "Young lady, pray tell, who is this?"

"I don't know. He and his friend were scouting our camp. They shot at me and then ran away, so I caught one of them in hopes of finding out. Unfortunately, it seems that our guest has swallowed his tongue, for I have heard no word come out of his mouth." replied Ayomide. The captive, in turn, glared at her.

"Of course, he hasn't spoken! Do you treat your guests like this?" Brown gestured at the man's bound hands and feet. "No man would speak if they were treated like this."

Ayomide sighed, closing her eyes and summoning all her patience. "...old man, he'd have killed me if his arrow landed. He's a prisoner of war, not your friend coming over for tea."

"Tea? Yes, that is an excellent idea. Sit down, young man. Young lady, unbind him and get us some tea please." Brown sat back down, clearing his desk of papers in preparation for tea time.

The old man really has lost the plot, thought Ayomide as she let the captive free of his bindings. The captive looked around, unsure what to do, before he decided to take the free seat offered by Brown. Soon Ayomide came back with three cups of tilia tea, and she took a seat for herself. She was sipping her tea while side-eyeing the captive.

"Excuse me for the lack of preparations. I wasn't expecting guests today." Brown sipped his tea for a bit before clearing his throat. "Ahem, I forgot to introduce myself. My name is John Brown, presently the Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz. Who might you be, young man?"

The "young man" in question, who was about twenty years older than Ayomide, broke his silence by reluctantly drinking his share of the tea. Then, after another long bout of silence, he finally broke his silence proper "I am Chevik, of the Karabush Host. That is all I will say."

"The Karabush Host?" Brown looked at Ayomide, a local of Gemeinplatz, for help.

"Oh, the hosts?" blurted Ayomide "Uhm... I don't know much about them. I did host a lot of customers in the café, but I'm guessing Chevik here is a different sort of host. I did hear Vaiz mention them once though. I passed by him on the way to here."

"Could you fetch him, young lady?"

Ayomide went out the room, and as quickly as she left she was back. "He was standing right outside the room."

Vaiz humbly bowed his head. “At your service, captain. I saw our guest while he was being transported, and I was quite curious as to who he was.”

“Apparently, he’s from the ‘Karabush Host’. Do you have any idea what that is, Mr. Vaiz?”

“Oh, the nomads!” Vaiz snapped his fingers “My early years in the Temple were spent doing missionary work in the borderlands. I was blessed to have gotten the chance to meet so many different faces. I-”

Vaiz was about to open his mouth again when Ayomide stopped him “Vaiz, please, stop reminiscing and answer the question.”

“Excuse me.” Vaiz looked intently at Chevik “Judging from his garments, he’s definitely telling the truth. There are various hosts on the borders of Gemeinplatz who are tasked with protecting the borderlands from raids and attacks. I’m guessing that this Karabush Host must be situated around the city of Karabush, which is to the northeast of Casamonu. They’re part of a federation of three city-states under vassalage of the Empire.”

“I see.” Brown leaned forward and rested his arms on the table. It seemed that things weren’t going to get any easier “How much of a threat do you think these hosts could be?”

“The hosts are nominally under control of the Empire, but from my time with them, they usually act under orders of the local lords or their own hetman. They’ll be as much of a threat as the lord of Karabush allows them to be, which...”

Ayomide interjected “I don’t know anything about the lord of Karabush, but I assume that he isn’t going to look too warmly on what we’re doing here.”

“...yes, we might have quite the hard time if Karabush sic their host on us. I had the opportunity to see how these hosts conduct warfare, and I will state bluntly that their way of fighting is far from honorable. They’ll raid Casamonu to the ground, and then retreat back on their horses to come back another day. I don’t know much of military matters captain, but I don’t think the League will be able to catch up with a band of experienced nomads.”

“That indeed would not be possible. Our cavalry is still fresh and inexperienced.” Brown hummed and erred while racking his brain. Suddenly, he spoke up “You’ve stated that there were other hosts, right? Casamonu is right on the border of the Empire from what I’ve seen on the maps. Shouldn’t there a Casamonu Host?”

“Yes captain, the Casamonu Host is where I spent most of my time back then. However, they’re situated on the other side of Mount Curry, far from the city. From what I heard back then, one of the previous counts of Casamonu had a dispute with their hetman, demanding that the host give up some fertile land around the city, and they were forced out of their land.”

“I see, I see... I should have asked about this much earlier.” Brown got up with gusto “Then, I believe that it’s time that we right some wrongs and let them back in. Vaiz, I believe you’ll be suitable for this task. Get together a delegation, maybe with some copperware as gifts, and tell them that we’re open to them coming back home.”

Chevik seemed shocked, judging from him almost getting up from his seat and opening his mouth. He sat back down after Ayomide shot him a deadly glance.

“Understood, captain. I’ll leave after I’ve finished a few bits of work related to the schools.” Vaiz humbly bowed again and left the room, leaving Brown and Ayomide alone with Chevik.

“Are you sure about this, old man?” suddenly asked Ayomide.

“Hm? What’s wrong, young lady?”

“I mean, look at this man and his scruffy face. These guys are nomads, you know, the uncivilized folk who run around the place and do whatever. I don’t feel secure having them around Casamonu.”

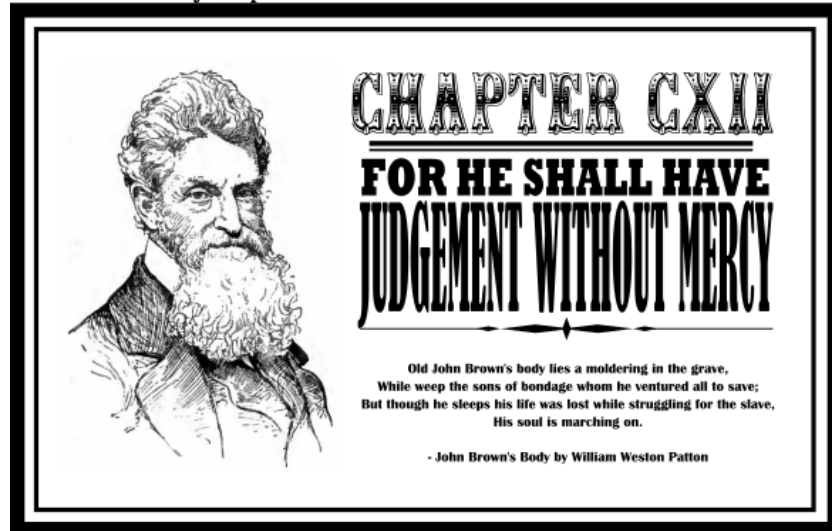
Brown raised a brow “Young lady, do you not see the irony in calling somebody else ‘uncivilized’? They’re the children of our Heavenly Father, the same as all of us. Them not living a settled life doesn’t change that.”

“Whatever you say old man.” Ayomide cusped her tea cup. It had gotten lukewarm while all the conversation had gone on. “I’ll take my leave then, to get the National Guard ready for cavalry attacks. By the way, what will we do with our guest?”

“Mister Chevik can stay with us until we can conduct diplomacy with his host.” Brown finished his lukewarm tea. “Karabush, it seems, will be our next destination.”

Chapter 118: Chapter CXII – For he shall have judgment without mercy.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 112



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

7th of Autumn 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

Today was a cold day up in Mount Curry. Snow had been creeping lower and lower as the temperatures fell, and the copper rooves of the city were seeing their first snow. Thankfully, for the copper workers at least, there were loads of kilns to warm them up.

Bilal, the former foreman and current mayor of Libertycave, wiped the sweat off his brow. “Folks, it’s break time. Let’s have lunch” he shouted into the busy crowds of kilnworkers working their faces off. He personally helped extinguish the kilns before exiting the copperworks along with the workers. He looked back at the building. The copperworks that were once a lone kiln out in a field had been constructed up into a massive building, a “factory” as Brown referred to it, which housed a hundred copperworkers during work hours, along with tons of copper brought from the copper mines up on the mountain. The bricks and copper roof of the building had been manufactured inside the copperworks itself, with a nice wooden gate donated by one emancipated carpenter. Right next to the copperworks were a set of lodgings for the workers and their families that included a dining room which they were heading to.

Entering the dining room, Bilal was greeted by a mess of workers claiming places to sit down. Some had packed their lunches, some were cooking it themselves in the kitchen, some were paying others to cook for them. Chairs were still a luxury, so most were sitting down. So did Bilal sit down as he had been left with no choice. He had a pack of hardtack in his pocket which he quickly crunched down on. Soon there was no hardtack, leaving a thirsty Bilal going outside to get water from a newly constructed water fountain. Mount Curry had plenty of water over and underground, so these fountains had been popping up like wild grass all over Libertycave.

With his thirst satiated, Bilal decided to take a visit to the public face of the copperworks. It was a small building right next to the factory with a sign on the door declaring “copper tools, trinkets, and everything in between sold here”. Bilal was happy to see that the stalls outside the shop were

stocked with goods, from knives to locket, and the salespeople operating the stalls greeted him as he approached. "Morning, Mr. Bilal."

"A fine morning to you as well. How are things? Any problems?" asked Bilal.

"No, sales are going well. The new mirrors we're selling have been doing especially well." The salesman held up a polished copper mirror. In the absence of glass, a "mirror" was just a metal disc that was polished enough to show Bilal's reflection on its surface.

"Excellent. Anything else?"

"Well, there was one odd thing..." The salesman looked back at a door which served as an entrance to the warehouse of the shop's stalls. "Just now, a pair of foreigners came in and inquired a bunch about our goods. When I told them that there was more in the warehouse, they asked to take a look. They're still inside the building."

"That really is one odd thing. There aren't many foreigners around these parts." Bilal checked if the dagger in his pocket was still in its place. It was, just in case that this odd pair turned out to be hostile. "I'll take a look."

Bilal entered the door to the warehouse. It was a cramped room full of copper goods which resembled a maze more than a warehouse. He could hear a pair talking to each other.

"...this too. The construction lacks in skill, but there definitely is passion and artistry behind it."

"Indeed. With some better kilns and training, these guys could rival the dwarves in quality."

"Well, maybe not the dwarves. That's a bit impossible to do."

The pair was startled as Bilal suddenly appeared behind them. "Good morning. What brings you here?"

"Oh goodness!" The man jumped up. So did the woman right next to him. "We- we were just inspecting the craftsmanship of the copperwork here."

Bilal hummed, curious. "...and who might you be?"

"I'm Mis, and this here is my husband Altan. We're smiths from Zon'guldac. Your Commander-in-Chief told us that we'd be needed here." The couple greeted Bilal in unison with a bow.

"Oh, Captain Brown? He had sent a letter telling me that we'd get some help from Zon'guldac..." Bilal inspected the couple. They were well-dressed, both of them carrying large backpacks on their back. It seemed that they were bringing all that they had from home.

Altan continued their speech "It's been quite hard for us back in Zon'guldac, what with the dwarves overshadowing whatever they make. They have this one metal, 'mithril' they call it, that they extract from this odd contraption and don't let anyone else use. How are we supposed to compete against that?!"

Mis interrupted Altan before he went on a rant "Ahem, we brought along whatever we could put on paper. In exchange for employment and housing, we're willing to help you set up kilns suitable for processing iron and steel. Believe me, your Republic isn't going far with just copper spears and tools."

Bilal found that a large grin had formed on his face. “Glad to have you then. I’m Bilal, the mayor of Libertycave. We have empty rooms in the lodgings, and the people over at the copperworks will appreciate your work.”

“Oh, one last thing.” Altan took out a piece of paper from one of his many pockets “Your Commander-in-Chief gave me a letter that was addressed to the mayor.” He handed the letter to Bilal.

“Thank you.” Bilal took the letter sealed in an envelope. It had Brown’s handwriting on it, though it looked hastily written. “You should head to the copperworks. Tell the people there that I sent you.”

With that, Bilal and the smiths separated. Unable to contain his curiosity, Bilal opened the letter right after they left.

To Mayor Bilal:

The tides of war have hit our shores once more. Karabush is scouting out our territory, most likely for an assault on our territory. The Empire is making moves against the dwarves on our border. Get your kilns fired up for mobilizing once more. Here is what the army needs...

7th of Autumn 5859

Yellowclover, State of Casamonu

Today was a cold day up in the village of Yellowclover. Despite the cold however, the peasants were out to sow the last of their winter wheat on their newly granted plots of land. The mass of people moved forward and back, some on oxen some on foot, letting the soil taste delicious seeds of wheat. Shirin, the sister of Shinasi, was hard at work too. She had gathered a few relatives and friends and relatives of friends to help with the sowing on her father’s plot of land.

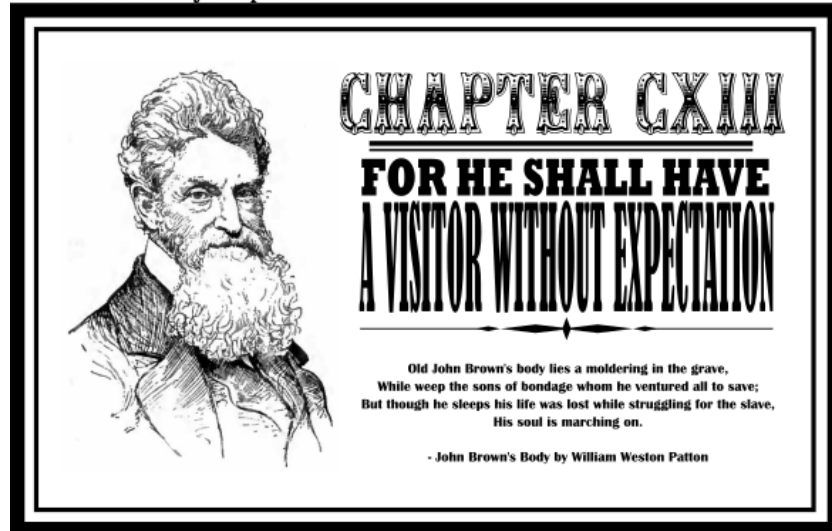
Work was finished by the time that the sun began to set, and the whole village gathered around the central square to celebrate this year’s sowing being done. There was much revelry, and a whole lot more beer, and Yellowclover was alive and well as usual. The festivities would have gone for much longer if not for the familiar drumming of a crier approaching the village. The flow of beer stopped as the crowd went silent to hear the crier make his announcement.

“Hear ye hear ye! A cavalryman sent by Karabush was captured scouting our land in Casamonu. The forces of the Empire surround us, and now they plan to crush us. Our Republic calls upon its able-bodied and brave to defend her. Food and lodging will be provided those who join the National Guard in the 2nd Infantry Regiment. Those who wish to join should head to Casamonu and apply. Remember: if the lords of the Empire are to come back, they won’t have mercy. Your land will be taken, and you’ll be back to barely subsiding on what little grain will be left untaxed. Defend the Republic if you wish to defend your liberty.” After a short little pause, the crier repeated the message again, and after the third time, he left Yellowclover to do his job in all the other villages around Casamonu.

In Casamonu, war was soon going to be back in fashion.

Chapter 119: Chapter CXIII – For he shall have a visitor without expectation.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 112



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

11th of Autumn 5859
Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

Knock, knock.

Brown raised his head from the map that he had been intently staring at for the last hour. “Come in.” It seemed that he was about to be distracted again. Visitors had become much more common now that everyone needed help with this and that related to mobilization.

Ayomide entered the room, dragging someone in by their arms “Captain, this guy was really insistent on meeting you.”

“Young lady, don’t drag our visitors like that. That’s quite rude.”

The guy being dragged by Ayomide was freed, and he was certainly an odd and intimidating character, with dark skin that resembled ash and crimson eyes that towered over Brown. His clothes, a business formal suit and tie, made him look way less intimidating however. “Greeting, Mister Brown. You have met me before, if only through the written word.” The visitor pointed towards the M1 Garand that Brown had set on the corner of his office “I hope you enjoyed my gift?”

“Wait, you’re Nirmal?” Brown got up to shake the hand of the dark elf of gun delivery “I certainly have appreciated your gift. Come, sit down. Would you like some tea?”

“Sure, I certainly need some refreshment after travelling for so long.” Nirmal and Brown were seated, and Ayomide soon returned with a cup of tilia tea for everyone in the room. “Thank you.”

“So, tell me Mr. Nirmal... well, tell me everything if you could, since we haven’t been introduced.” Brown tapped at the map on his desk, quite curious as to who this mysterious Good Samaritan was.

“Let me start from the beginning then.” Nirmal took a sip from the tea to prepare his throat for a long speech “I was born in the forests of Zon’guldac, to the dark elves who hide in the deepest parts to escape from all the other elves. I don’t remember much since I was very young, except that one day my village was no more and I was left an orphan wanderer until I was captured by slave traders who were enticed by my ‘exotic’ features.”

“Goodness...” Brown shook his head.

Ayomide suddenly interjected “Similar to my youth then, though I remember my village was in a place that had few trees. The grass was... yellowish, the earth was red, and what trees I remember look very different than the ones here. I can’t describe it exactly. Those are all an indistinct blur to me now.”



“It’s very hard to remember something when you’ve never gotten a chance to see it ever again” replied Nirmal “I believe it has been more than a century since I’ve been back in Zon’guldac.”

Brown was shocked “A century?! You don’t look anywhere close to a hundred years old, Mr. Nirmal.”

“That’s just how elves age, Mr. Brown. Very slowly. I’ve been waiting for a very long time to get a taste of freedom. Kim did “emancipate” me and many others, only to make us work to the bone for his company to pay off our debt to him.” Nirmal took off his tie and laid it on the table “I gave my resignation letter a week ago. A bit late to be sure, but I had some unfinished business back on your planet.”

““Your planet?” Do you mean Earth?” asked Brown. All this otherworlder stuff sure was confusing for a man in his sixties.

“Yes. Kim had a gate that he could pass through to get himself to and from Earth to Gemeinplatz. Unfortunately, I couldn’t bring anything except the clothes on my back. I don’t have any

possessions to my name save for what's on me right now. That gate has closed now that Kim is gone, so I can't go back either. I had to travel all the way from the capital to here after returning from Earth."

Brown leaned forward, putting his arms on the table "Earth... What was the date when you left? It was 1859 when I had to take my leave."

"It was 2023 when I left. I had heard your name, so I did some research on 'John Brown' before I left, as much as I could do on a public library computer anyways. You look just like the photos that I saw in my research, and you did die in 1859." Nirmal didn't need to add how odd it felt to see a dead historical figure standing right in front of him.

"Hmm? Is my name known well enough that you can do research on me two centuries later?" Brown, humble as he was, couldn't help but feel proud.

"Yes. Your Wikipedia page is quite impressive."

"...my what page?"

"It's an online encyclopedia."

"An on... ah, it's one of those fancy computer things that Watanabe talked about. Apologies, I was apparently two centuries behind to ever see one of those."

"Right, I don't know too much about Earth's history. I didn't spend too much time back there. Most of my business was related to accounting Kim's business on Gemeinplatz."

"Regardless, your business with Kim is over now, and the Republic could use a good accountant or two. I'm sure Dr. Rabanowicz would appreciate having more time to work on her scientific work rather than crunch numbers. What do you say?" Brown extended a hand towards Nirmal.

Nirmal shook Brown's hand with the excellent formality of a well-seasoned office worker "Of course. I didn't place myself in all that trouble to deliver that rifle for nothing. Kim paid me basically nothing anyways, so you can't do much worse than him."

Brown retracted his hands after the shake, and smiled at his new coworker "Our plan isn't to 'not do much worse', our plan is to do much better, may Providence guide us there. Ask Dr. Rabanowicz for what she needs help with. She should be back in the castle by lunch."

"Actually, captain, I saw her screaming joyfully this morning while waving a huge piece of paper around." Ayomide looked out the door of Brown's office "I believe she's still out there somewhere."

"What was she screaming about?"

"About having managed to get a working copy of a printing press." Ayomide shrugged. She didn't care much about the odd paper-marking machines that everyone seemed so obsessed about.

Nirmal looked out the door too, though he found only the empty corridor outside "She seems like an... interesting woman, to say the least." He rose up from his seat "I'll go looking for her. Glad to be working with you, Mr. Brown."

“Glad to have finally met you, Mr. Nirmal.” After Nirmal left, Brown dug himself back into his maps, while Ayomide left to do her job as a captain...

11th of Autumn 5859

Courtyard of Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

Knock, knock.

In front of Ayomide was fresh meat: the 2nd Infantry Division. As a captain of the 1st Infantry Division, formerly known as the League of Gileadites, it was her duty to command the training of the newcomers today. The 2nd Infantry Division differed much from the 1st, mostly from the fact that these recruits were rural peasants and not emancipated slaves. To Ayomide, they were as alien as Martians and the concept of Mars.

“Good morning, people. I welcome you to the fine army of our republic.” She could feel snickering as she approached the soldier-candidates who were much taller than her. Some were focusing on her ears, some on her tail, and Ayomide wished they’d focus on her sword which she was debating whether to bonk one of them with to make an example. She decided on a much less violent example. “Okay, are there any volunteers to take me on in a no-weapon duel? Whoever falls on the ground first loses.”

After a bit more laughter and banter, a particularly large farmhand stepped up. “Miss, you can surrender now if you’d like. I wouldn’t want to hurt a lady.”

“Yeah yeah, spare me the talk.” Ayomide rolled up the sleeves of her uniform. “Come on, don’t hold back.”

The farmhand charged at her directly. Ayomide simply stepped aside, letting the man lose his balance as he tried to grapple on to air. As he tried to regain his balance, Ayomide kicked him right on the shins, causing him to topple down face-first on to the ground. “Okay, anyone else? I’ll tell you that I’ve gone through a fair amount of scuffle before I came here. I didn’t survive for this long by being a meathead. That’s the first lesson.”

Another contender entered the ring, a fellow perhaps as large as the last one. This one managed to grab Ayomide’s arm, only to be poked in the eyes and lose his grip. Then all Ayomide had to do was kick him on the stomach and watch him fall down. “Hey, that’s not fair!” cried out the fellow who had his eyes poked.

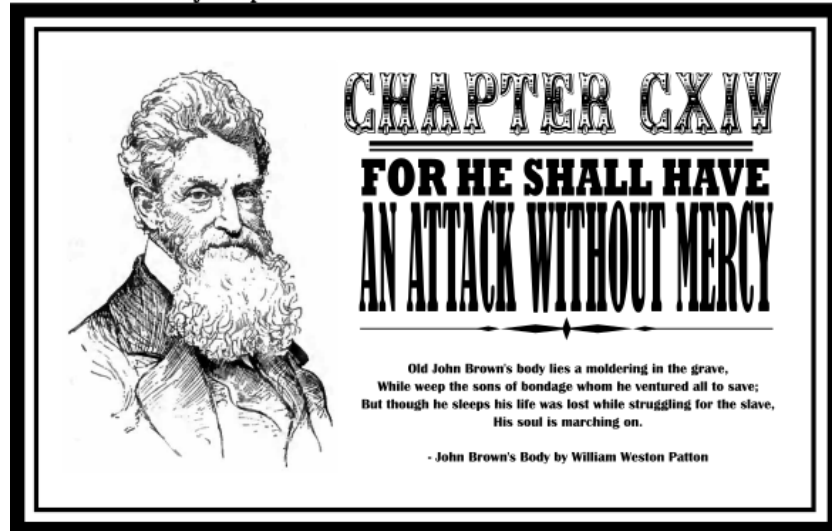
“Second lesson: We’re not fighting fair here. Chivalry is for bluebloods, we’re all a bunch of nobodies. Poke out everyone’s eyes out if you need to. Anyone else willing to challenge me?”

It took a good few minutes before anyone stepped up. This time Ayomide’s opponent tried to poke Ayomide’s eye out. It didn’t go well as it was obvious what they were trying to do. Ayomide grabbed their two fingers reaching for her, and then twisted them a bit to cause her opponent to fall on the ground wincing in pain “Third lesson: Be quiet. Don’t make it obvious what you’re planning to do.” She turned back around to her audience, which had gone quiet out of respect.

“Now that I’ve gotten your attention, are you ready for some actual training?”

Chapter 120: Chapter CXIV – For they shall have an attack without mercy.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 114



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

12th of Autumn 5859 Imperial Highway №04-765, Libertycave

Today was a cold day out in Azdavay. Bilal regretted not bringing another coat as he sat on the back of a carriage going down the newly-built stretch of macadam road. Along the road were occasional pools of half-melted snow that soon would cover the highlands and, eventually, even the lowlands of Casamonu. Passing by a milestone, it read “Imperial Highway №04-765 – 10 miles from Libertycave – Built by the National Guardsmen of Libertycave in 5859”. He couldn’t help but let out a slight snicker at the Imperial moniker. The public roads connecting cities had been known as “imperial highways” since time immemorial, and so the Republic had kept the naming and numbering system intact even as it built new ones meant to help erase the Imperials. “I wonder if, one day in the future, ‘imperial’ will only refer to these roads” he thought out loud.

“If we do a good enough job in burying those Imperial bastards into history, yeah” replied the carriage driver on the front. “They deserve to be trampled under us once they’re buried, no?”

“Hmm...” Before Bilal could find a clever comeback, he had come to the end of the road and had to get off and do his job. There was a camp for the construction workers, the enlisted workers of the National Guard, who were currently on break. The banner of Libertycave, a white triangle representing a cave on a copper-orange background, flew on a few of the tents. An odd vexillological frenzy had overtaken the locals with the foundation of the Republic and the ascension of Casamonu as its first state, and they had voted in this banner to be the official banner of Libertycave a few days ago. Perhaps it was enticing, for those who had been enslaved so long, to practice their liberty by getting to use the rights of holding their own banner like a nobleman would. Unlike a nobleman’s banner however, everyone got to hang the banner of Libertycave if they so wished. Libertycave banners had flown off the shelves a few hours after the vote had been concluded. Speaking of flying off shelves, “why are there stalls here?”

“Oh, Mr. Bilal!” The bloke at the stall answered “We had some people passing by here, so we thought we could conduct some extra business with the passersby.”

“As long as you aren’t delaying the road construction...” Bilal shrugged, continuing his trip around the camp. He greeted a few of the workers and did some small-talk to make sure things were going well. Most of the conversation was pretty regular: complaints about the weather, copper tools breaking, some coworkers being annoying...

“...I was wondering if we should get some walls up for our camp. Things are dangerous, I hear” said one worker sitting around a fire to warm up.

“How so?” asked his co-worker.

“Haven’t you heard the criers going around, warning about a potential attack?” The worker looked around him with paranoia, as if cavalrymen could jump out at any moment.

“Realistically, we won’t need to worry about horsemen riding up the mountain. A horde of horsemen couldn’t easily make their way through here...” Bilal was interrupted by a horde of clops heard from the direction of where the road was. He turned around to see that, indeed, a horde of horsemen could fit on the road, and these horsemen certainly looked foreign. The National Guard jumped up from their cozy seats to gather their spears, though the horsemen would have long overrun them by the time they scrambled together in a formation to stop them. Thankfully, the horsemen didn’t seem hostile... yet. “What’s going on here?!”

“Gentleman, and ladies, calm down please.” A familiar priest rode forward on his ride. Vaiz stopped when he thought that enough people had seen his presence “They’re our new allies from the Casamonu Host. I’m returning back from a diplomatic mission, and it’d be quite helpful if we could take a rest here without incident.”

“Oh, I was worried for a second...” Bilal relaxed his shoulders, relieved that he wasn’t going to die today “Well, I’m sure that the people here don’t mind some visitors. Where are you headed to anyways?”

“I’ll stop for a meeting with Mister Brown, while these guys are going to be busy setting themselves back up in their land and protecting the guys constructing the other highway.” Vaiz got off his horse, and so did his nomad comrades. Things quickly got lively as the men of the host mingled with the workers, and soon there was a festive environment around the place. The workers exchanged their trinkets for odd bits and bobs from the other side, meat jerky from the host was traded for slime jelly, and so on and so forth as impromptu cultural exchange happened.

Bilal and Vaiz retreated to a corner to have themselves some calm over tea. “Do you have any news from the people over in the other highway? Having the dwarves trade over here would be a huge help to Libertycave.”

“Hmm...” Vaiz played around with the cup, waiting for his hands to warm up “I’m not really in the business of economy and infrastructure, but from the way that Mr. Brown was talking, I got the idea that the road would be done way before winter came if nothing goes wrong.”

“If nothing goes wrong.” Bilal too was playing around with his cup, though for a different reason. He looked down from the road, towards the direction where Casamonu would be. He wondered how things were going over there...

12th of Autumn 5859
Imperial Highway №04-030, Casamonu

It was a cold day out in the lands of the highway. Autumn had truly come, from the countless orange leaves to the mountains in the distance slowly getting snowier and snowier. About twenty miles (32 km) of road had already been laid, with 80 miles (129 km) to go. Their dwarven comrades on the other side had done around the same amount, and with such a pace, Casamonu-Zon'guldac would be connected again by the middle of Autumn.

The wagons upon wagons of construction goods had been retracted once more to form a wagon fort staffed by the workers of the National Guard. They had been on high alert ever since the scouts had been scouted out. Four lookouts circled around the wagons, keeping their torches high in order to lighten up anyone trying to approach during the night.

Such a delicate situation required guards with keen observation skills, ones with experience and gusto. Billy wasn't any of those things, but he had survived the siege and joined the National Guard as he couldn't really get any other job in Casamonu. Now, as fate had doomed him to, he was guarding a place once more. Right next to him was a tough-looking lady who had a sword that was as tall as a wagon and as thick as a board. He was bored, so he slowly sidestepped towards her "Yo, ain't the weather cold today?"

Shakira, the wielder of the absurdly large armament in question, continued idly looking at the sky. Billy was about to get the message and abandon her right before she finally said something "...it's Autumn in Casamonu. What did you expect?"

"Erm, yeah." Billy scooted back towards Shakira's side "Standing idle, it just makes a person colder y'know. Drinking something usually makes me feel warmer. Wish I wasn't on guard so I could grab a drink."

Shakira yawned "I'm definitely gonna go back to the city on the weekend to grab myself something or two."

"Oh!" Billy hadn't even needed to ask her what she was doing on the weekend "I was planning on just that as well! Maybe-" His conversation was interrupted by the sound of hooves pounding the ground. "Crap, is it those nomads?!"

"It's just one horse, dumbass. I don't think they'd approach this place with just one man." Still, Shakira unsheathed her massive sword just in case she needed to cut prime chunks of unprocessed glue.

They rushed to the gate of the wagon fort, only to be met by a solitary horseman who bore the yellow uniform of Casamonu. He had already gotten off his horse, and he had his package cradled in his arms "Delivery for the road builders!"

"Lemme see-" Billy almost stumbled when the deliveryman dumped a stack of paper in his arms. "Woah, what are these?" Billy couldn't read what was written on them, but he could understand that these texts were printed rather than hand-written.

"Your wages; give one paper to everyone in the camp. You'll be able to exchange these for libra once you're back in Casamonu. There are also some educational pamphlets for those of you who

can read.” He raised up a copy that he had taken for himself to show the illiterates in front of him what that looked like. It was titled “Elementary Knowledge on Mathematics” for short, with a very long “For those looking for the fundamental knowledge on simple mathematical principles, originally printed for public schools of the Republic, available for all citizens to peruse if they so wish” added below the title as a subtitle. At the bottom there was a text declaring it to have been the “1st Edition - Printed in Casamonu, on orders of the Council of the Gemeinplatz Republic, written by a commission headed by Dr. R. R. Rabanowicz, Watanabe Haruhi, H.E. Vaiz and John Brown.”

“I don’t know if anyone will be interested in that, but we’ll try and deliver them.” Billy was about to dump some of the papers on Shakira for her to hold, but his eyes noticed movement outside the gate. He couldn’t understand what or who it was, but there were figures swiftly moving in the plains. They were way too far, so far that they looked like ants, but Billy could see the light reflecting off of their helmets. “Someone... A lot of someone, people, people in the distance!”

“Huh?” Shakira too noticed the group outside. The deliveryman too turned around, and jumped back in fear.

“This movement... It must be men on horseback!” The deliveryman dragged his horse inside the wagon fort in a hurry.,

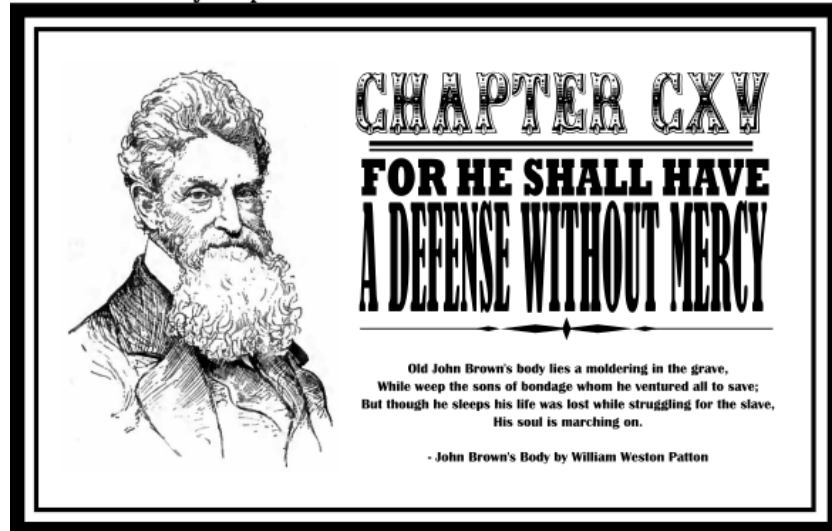
“Damn it, it’s the nomads!” shouted Billy. His shout woke up some in the camp, who proceeded to panic themselves, and soon the whole camp was awake. Everybody scrambled for their weapons: a lucky few had standard-issue copper spears, while all others had to make do with what they had brought into the National Guard. A wall, if it could be called that with how wavy it was, formed around the “gate” of the wagon fort while others with ranged weaponry scrambled to climb on to the wagons.

As the cavalrymen got close by their blue-red tabards became clearly identifiable, which showed that they were no friends of the yellowcoats. The battle began with a horse archer firing the first shot, and soon many others followed suit in their way towards the residents of the wagon fort.

Thus had begun the Battle of the 30th Highway.

Chapter 121: Chapter CXV – For they shall have a defense without mercy.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 115



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

12th of Autumn 5859 Imperial Highway №04-030, Casamonu

It was quite the stressful situation for the poor sods in the wagon fort: nobody found it fun to be in the middle of the fort while a horde of horse archers turned the wagons into porcupines with all the arrows that they shot. The fort provided safety, but it also acted as a prison now that they couldn't get out without joining the wagons in becoming like porcupines.

Billy was running around like a headless chicken, cowering behind a wagon, getting scared of the sound of arrows hitting wood, and then running to another wagon and so on and so forth as the cycle repeated.

"What the hell are you doing man?!" Shakira was following behind him, mostly because she had nothing else to do in particular. The enormous sword on her back clanged and weighed her down as she crouched down alongside him.

"It's the end! We're all gonna die!" shouted Billy, only to receive a firm poke to his side with the handle of Shakira's sword "Ow, what was that for?!"

"You're gonna die by my hand if you keep shouting right in my ear!" shouted Shakira. Everyone else around her was shouting as well, so she couldn't help but shout in response to get herself heard

"Sorry!" replied Billy with a shout, receiving another blunt poke "Ow, ow, ow..."

"This isn't my first-time getting projectiles rained down on me. Calm down and think of what to do." Shakira looked around her. There wasn't much to do, now that she thought about it. Suddenly, she heard a loud thud on the other side of the wagon they were hiding behind. The world lit up, and suddenly they were hiding behind a wagon on fire. Billy screamed like a girl and Shakira screamed

like a boy as they jumped away from the fire. The night had become day and the day had become hell. Now the soldiers could see the faces of their enemy and their movements. The horse archers were circling around the fort in a dizzying manner, taking shots at the fort and moving fast to avoid taking shots at their own bodies. There were a few brave men on the wagon forts taking pot shots towards the cavalry. A few had gone limp with an arrow stuck in their chest, others had just fainted from shock, and the rest were doing a Billy by running around the place in panic. "Uhm... Yeah, we're screwed."

"Thanks for the help, milady." Billy got up to his two feet. It felt like the grim reaper had finally come to take him after his lively escape from the Siege of Casamonu. The horse archers circled around them. The fire circled around them. The stars in the sky suddenly circled around them. Suddenly, more cavalry. "I-It seems that the nomads want to make sure that we're dead."

As if to extend an objection to Billy's words, the new group of nomads began riding in circles not around the camp but right next to the other group of nomads. Billy thought that maybe that bottle of rectified spirits had done permanent damage to his vision and that he was seeing double, but Shakira pointing towards the cavalry and screaming "Who are these guys?!" let him know that his vision was doing fine.

"I don't know. Allies? They all have the same type of gear..." He could only distinguish the two sides from one of them having tabards and the other not having them.

"I didn't know the guys over at Casamonu had cavalry." Shakira grabbed her sword tight "Well, if we have help, then we too should help the help."

"...I got what you're trying to say, but the wording is nonsensical. Whatever." As Billy had noticed in the respite that they had finally gotten, the others had gotten to extinguishing the wagon fort now that the attackers were distracted. The barrels of water and booze were being dumped on the burning cart in an attempt to stop the fire. "I'm making myself comfortable here. Our job is to build a road, not to repel a full-on cavalry raid."

"Fair enough." Shakira left her sword to grab four buckets of whatever, Billy followed by struggling to carry one, and they followed the conga line of soldiers working hard to defeat the fire. They were safe as the nomads were busy fighting each other and they didn't really care much about the unhorsed losers who were waddling on their own two feet. The soldiers waiting in line to put out the fire watched the cavalry battle as if it was a theater show, though their view was obstructed as the fire was put out and the night came back once more. It seemed that the darkness seemed to extinguish the combat as well: the enemy cavalrymen retreated out into the woods, leaving their dead and injured behind which presented a horrifying scene as the dying screams of men ringing out from the dark wasn't particularly pleasant to hear. The soldiers got to tending the wounded and capturing any prisoners, while the nomads dismounted from their horses. One of them, who had a particularly fancy helmet with a plume on it, shouted "Who is your commander?"

The soldiers of the National Guard looked at each other to see who'd get stuck with telling the nomads of the situation. The gazes passed and passed, until the last guy to get gazed at had to step forward. Billy hailed the fancy-plume nomad "Our commander is in Casamonu right now. We're working on road construction right now, so I guess our foreman is the closest thing we've got."

"That's an impressive fort for a bunch of construction workers. You'd have been dead out in the open field" replied the plume man. "We'll inform your commander back in the city then. She said that we should settle around here for a while, so we'll be your neighbors."

“Glad to know that we have some people who know how to ride horses around us.” Billy did feel a bit apprehensive considering that these guys, at least in his uncultured eyes, looked the same as the guys as the who were shooting at them a minute ago. The nomads separated from the soldiers to go pitch their own tents right next to the wagon fort. As it had happened before, the two camps began mingling with each other almost immediately. The denizens of the wagon fort had brought out their finest hardtack and booze to exchange for small bales of wool from the nomads. The sheep that Brown loved so much had huddled around one of the tents, joined by goats who the nomads prized for their wool which was rumored to be softer than the clouds in the sky. The people who had actually climbed high enough up on Mount Curry to touch the clouds would say that clouds weren’t solid enough to be soft, but those people were also pedantic losers that nobody cared to listen to.

As the food and booze came out to celebrate a victory, Billy and Shakira sat down to finally have a rest. For some reason, a strange sort of attraction perhaps that only two people who survived a battle together can experience, the two had stuck together despite having been strangers a few hours ago.

“Cheers!” Billy raised his mug and clanked it together with his comrade-in-arms’. The beer was lukewarm, but as Billy blurted out after scrunching his face up from the taste “It’s nice to be alive, eh?”

“It’d be nicer with some cold drinks, but adventurers can’t be choosers.” Shakira took a sip. It tasted like... well, if she was to be blunt, piss. “Okay, maybe I *can* be a chooser.” She dumped the contents of the cup into the ground.

“Ah, I could have had your portion...” Billy lamented the perfectly good drink being wasted.

“Your taste buds are as rotten as your social skills, buddy” replied Shakira. She sufficed with a sip of water from the flask on her waist.

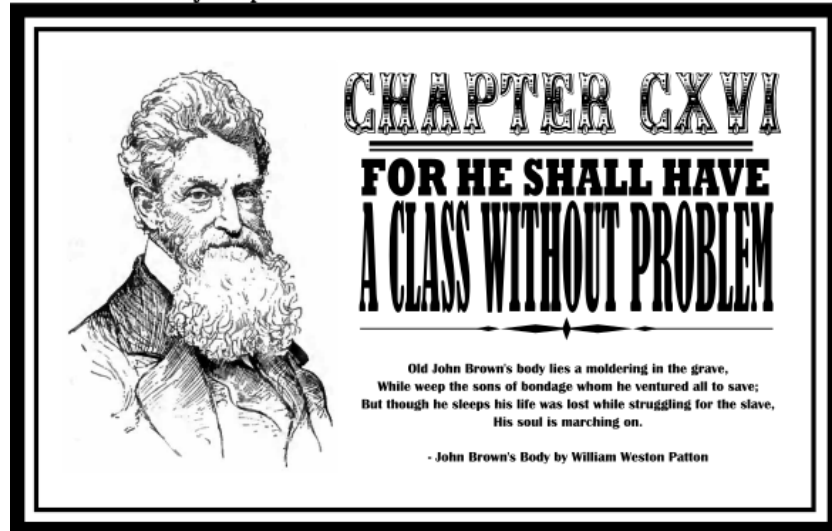
“You say so, yet you’re still talking to me. How come?”

“Your face scrunches up like you’ve been kicked in the shin, but you’re still drinking. Same thing.”

Under the countless stars that decorated the sky, the night went on like so. From those lowly adventurers who ventured to-and-fro, to the emancipated slaves who breathed free air, to the nomads who didn’t recognize rooves, the stars smiled on them all equally.

Chapter 122: Chapter CXVI – For they shall have a class without problem.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 116



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

14th of Autumn 5859
New Liberty School, Casamonu

“What is this good for?” blurted out Ayomide flipping around the textbook in her hands. It was cheaply-made paperback copy of... something, she couldn’t exactly read what was inside.

“I’m pretty sure we’re here to *learn* what it’s good for” replied Shinasi. They were sitting right next to each other in a nobleman’s dining hall which had been converted into a classroom. The fancy chandelier and soft chairs were certainly way too luxurious even for the most prestigious of educatory establishments. Most of the common people who had entered the place were more focused on awing at the luxurious room, playing around with the chairs, wondering how that chandelier wasn’t falling down, and certainly not acting orderly while waiting for the teacher. The people inside were quite diverse, from young to old, to freed slaves to the free citizens of Casamonu, and everything in between. Certainly, the idea of “public education” was amusing enough, like a circus troupe coming to town, that everyone wanted in to at least bemuse themselves with the odd ideas of the commander-in-chief, including Ayomide and Shinasi. Both had learned a bit of math from the schooling in Libertycave, though they had never advanced on to writing save for a few letters of Latin script. Ayomide could at least write her own name unlike Shinasi, though the jury was still out on whether “Aonide” was good enough of a spelling.

“It’s a bunch of flabbergast business, but the old man said that reading is lots of fun, so I guess I’ll entertain the idea.” Ayomide looked at the textbook again. Why did they give them one when they couldn’t even read yet... It had a bunch of squares, another bunch of squiggles, and many other drawings which she was certain were there to make fun of them and be nonsensical to an absurd degree.

“Well, for me, I’d rather not have to pay anyone to read the board on some adventurer’s guild ever again.” Having his precious groschen be taken away by the reading nerds who’d read an announcement for one groschen...

Ayomide looked at Shinasi's face directly to make sure if he was serious "Are you even going to ever go back there?"

"When things settle down one way or another and we don't need to do battle anymore, we're still going to need to work to make ends meet. Unless the commander-in-chief finds a way to make money grown on trees that is, but we're in Gemeinplatz and not Cockaigne."

"I think making money grow on sheep would be more his style. You'd think that wool is made from silver foil the way he talks about it." Ayomide immediately got tired of sheep-talk, and she jumped to the first thing that came to her mind "I wonder what job I could do when this is all over."

"We could adventure together! A tank and a support mage sound wond-"

Ayomide put a finger over Shinasi's yapping mouth to shut him up "No, I've had enough of risking my tail. I'd rather have you settle down as well."

"Y-yes, ma'am." Shinasi deliberated whether to ask 'settle down with whom?', but he already knew the answer. "I guess I... we can settle down in my village and work the land."

"Hmm... You don't sound too enthusiastic about it. How about we do both: settle down, and travel to new places when we don't have any work to do on the farm? I don't think we need some guild to travel around the place."

"True, true..." Shinasi nodded along. Right before he was about to daydream about living under one roof with Ayomide, he was rudely interrupted by the door (a pretty big one for a grand former dining hall) opening and the teacher entering.

"*Adohe shelmiy Boczhe*, quieten down please." Rabanowicz entered the room, carrying a very sturdy looking stick that she was bending with her two hands as if it was a whip. Her being a middle-aged lady with spectacles and an attitude certainly made her appear teacherly. She marched, each and every step emanating throughout the hall with her boots clanking on the stone tiles of the floor, to the head of the grand dining hall table. "Welcome, to our first class. I am Doctor Raban Rabanowicz Rabanow, your teacher. It's not everyday that you'll get education from a Doctor of Natural Philosophy, so listen well."

"Lady, what does a 'doctor' mean?" shouted a student from the back.

"It means that I spent way too much time in the University of Cyouc" replied Rabanowicz sarcastically "for now, that won't matter because we're starting with the basest of the basics." She turned around to the open door "Watanabe! Quicker, you were supposed to enter along with me!"

"Excuse me doctor..." Watanabe dragged a huge piece of slate enclosed in a wooden frame on two wheels. He regretted having mentioned needing a 'blackboard', though the locals here called it a 'writing slate'. He left the writing slate right behind Rabanowicz, and then sat on a nearby chair to pant his lungs out. "Phew, these things are heavier than I remember..." He himself had dressed the part of an assistant by ironing his professional blue suit and jeans left over from Earth. He regretted having died in a business suit rather than something more comfortable like his pajamas, but it rarely proved useful in times like these.

"Won't you introduce yourself, monsieur?" Rabanowicz shot a glance at Watanabe. He understood and jumped up from the chair.

“Ah yes, hello... Ahem!” He suddenly stopped being exasperated as he took on the soulless, professional voice of a salaryman “Pleased to meet you, I’m Watanabe Haruhi.” He wrote his name on the blackboard out of habit, in a script that nobody in the room could understand except him “I’m Doctor Rabanowicz’s assistant, and also the Hero. I look forward to working with you.” He politely bowed his head down to complete his perfect self-introduction in record time.

“...wow, that guy couldn’t manage to look further from a hero” commented Ayomide. Other people around the table murmured similar things as well, but they didn’t want to openly go against the claims of an otherworlder.

Rabanowicz politely shoved Watanabe aside and took a piece of chalk that had been conveniently placed next to the blackboard. “Now that introductions are done, let’s get on to writing.” She quickly, yet proficiently with excellent handwriting, laid out 32 letters on the board. “Say with me: A, Ä, Å, B, C, Č, D, E, F, G, guegh, guwa... ah...” She tapped on one letter a few times before giving up on spelling it by itself “This one sounds like the last sound you make when saying ‘dough’, okay? Ahem, H, I, eugh, J, K, L, M, N, O, Ö, P, R, S, Š, T, U, Ü, V, W, Q, Y, Z. Got that? I’ll go over it again...” She read the letters again, and again, in a matter which was impossible to transcribe to text and a futile enough attempt had been made previously in this paragraph. “We’ll go over the vowels today. Please flip to the 3rd page where you’ll find exercises for writing these letters.”

Ayomide and Shinasi did so, finding printed copies of a few of the letters found on the board. The page contained stroke-by-stroke depictions of the letters being written, courtesy of Watanabe being inspired by his time at elementary school having to learn how to write *kanji* with the correct stroke order and requesting that these be added to the textbooks. Below these depictions were a few empty squares containing space for these letters to be written again and again. Unfortunately, ink was pretty expensive, so Ayomide and Shinasi along with most of the student body had been handed out slates to practice writing on with chalk. Unlike the cramped cave, the dining room/classroom was way more comfortable to be learning in. Not to mention that learning the script of Gemeinplatz, way more widespread than Latin script, felt way better of an investment to Ayomide and Shinasi.

As she finished her second line of ‘A’s, Ayomide entered a sort of trance. A, A, A, A, A, more and more. After a point she wasn’t looking at the board or the textbook, only writing lines upon lines on the enchanting surface of the slate. Forget reading, writing was fun too! The next vowel came after she had memorized A, then the next, and all others, until she had memorized all the vowels and put her slate down.

“Are you tired, Ayomide?” Shinasi was still struggling on getting a good-looking A. He looked over to what Ayomide had maniacally written down “Wait, you finished all of them? Did you skip some?”

“No.” Ayomide closed her eyes and wrote down a letter to prove it “I know them all.”

“Sheesh, after all that complaining about writing not for you, you do this... Back in the guild they said that magic-users had high intelligence, and I guess you’re no exception.”

“Uhm?” Ayomide turned her head around, embarrassed. She didn’t exactly know how to reply to being praised for intelligence of all things. “Thanks?”

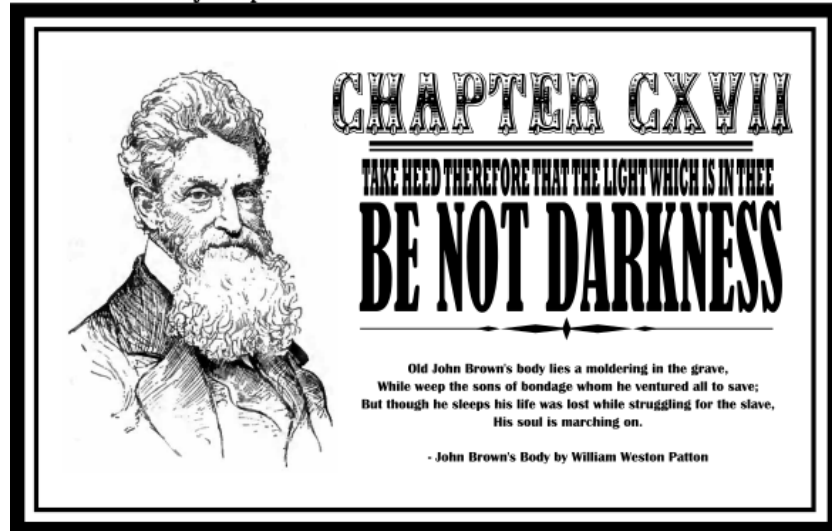
“You should help me understand these once we’re out of here.” Shinasi tried another A, magnificently scrunkling it up. “Yeah, I really need help.”

Ayomide laughed at the sight of that letter “You’re beyond help, but I’ll do my best.” She looked at the other letters on the board. “Guess I can work on the others while waiting...”

Learning was fun as it turns out, when one didn’t do it in a dim cave.

Chapter 123: Chapter CXVII – Take heed therefore that the light which is in thee be not darkness.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 117



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

15th of Autumn 5859 The Gray Palace, Imperial Capital of Hauptstadt

The hallow grey brick of the palace rang hollow as a pair of men were making their way down a hall. Both were dressed in fine silk, with an attitude silkier than their clothes. Their steps rang loud as did the steps of all high-up men who didn't have to concern themselves with walking modestly. Unlike their steps though, they spoke with more hushed tones.

"I travelled all the way from Schwarzpoppiburg just to represent the Marquis" complained a retainer, a tall fellow with a few scars on his face to his name.

The other, a priest, nodded "I'm from Ancoire, and His Holiness was just as surprised that the Imperial Diet was called. Our archives show that the last one was called a century ago to resolve some disputes about taxation."

"I'd say that a slave uprising does warrant a state of alarm, but I'd also say that the count of Casamonu should have been able to deal with it himself, or at least get some Imperial support to deal with such an issue. I was sent to Casamonu a few times to help coordinate military action against the nomad threat on the border, and we had an Imperial garrison stationed in a nearby fort assist us greatly during that time." The retainer shrugged with a hint of annoyance "Is anybody doing their jobs properly over there?"

"I assume not if this is how things are." The priest stopped right in front of an exceptionally large door. The door had a depiction of the Divine watching over a meeting of nobleman around a round table inlaid in gold, which was quite suitable for the room that hid behind it. The two representatives entered the room and mixed into the crowd of other representatives, to become nameless amongst the countless others in the room.

One individual of note was Sir Albert Spear, who conspicuously cleared his throat to get everyone's attention. He stood at the head of a long round table, with his seat right next to the emperor's. "Welcome, gentlemen." In front of him stood a plaque that laid out his title clearly: Chancellor Albert Spear. He had added a fancy feather on his hat to denote his fancy role. In front of him were the most important men of the realm who had the right to sit on the Imperial Diet: three counts (of Prusia and Altstadt), one duke (of Cutohia), one baron (of Agrilon), a high mayor (of Esmira), two representatives from the otherworld occupation zones (Palaocasa and Chanakburg), and two representatives of those who couldn't make it (Ancoire and Schwarzpoppiburg). The representatives for Zon'guldac and Casamonu were missing, and their seats were conspicuously empty. "I apologize for having called upon all of you personally, but we are in a situation where we all require your presence and cooperation. We had already called the Diet a while back, and by the time that all representatives have arrived here, Casamonu fell to a rebellion of slaves."

The representative from Schwarzpoppiburg stood up to have his word "Isn't there an Imperial garrison there for border defense? I have only heard about Casamonu itself falling. Elite Imperial troops should have been able to wipe out any slave rebellion."

"Unfortunately, the fort there was deconstructed months ago due to budgetary constraints." Spear knew very well about the fort's deconstruction: he had been the one to give the deconstruction order as Imperial Architect. He had expected the county to fall to nomads, but a slave rebellion would do just as fine. "The Imperial demesne can barely maintain itself when the loyal vassals of the emperor do not pay their dues properly" he added with a clearly bitter tone. The lords were clearly displeased at the ungrateful, uppity attitude of the Chancellor. They whispered their discontent at each other.

"What does he think he is?"

"Such ambitious chancellors come and go. We'll ask the emperor to fire him from his post once this Diet is done."

"The Imperials can't do much anyways, don't be fooled by his big words."

Spear continued "It's clear the Empire has degenerated into a shadow of its former self. If we had a strong, united realm, then this whole slave business would have been done with long ago. Look at what Chieftainess Leafblower is doing with the help of Imperial authority: she has united all elves under her banner and soon she'll be bringing the dwarves, who have long acted independently of the Empire, back under His Imperial Majesty's fold. Centuries of elven and dwarven bickering were ended with just one Imperial decree. Wouldn't it be nice if we could do the same with human bickering?"

The lords of the Diet shifted uneasily in their seats. What was this fool yapping about? The Diet was silent. They'd surely express their discontent once they were out of the hallow halls of the Gray Palace.

"Therefore, the time has come to solve human bickering: one Imperial decree to end human bickering in the Empire. I needed you all here for its unveiling." Spear took the decree which he had already put on the table. "Ahem! 'Decree Relating to Ending Unnecessary Division Within the Empire and Finding a Satisfactory Solution as to the Darkskin Question. In the name of His Imperial Majesty: The Empire has long become degenerate, with lords conspiring at every turn to resist any sort of unity or centralization. to keep their position as absolute rulers within their demesne." The lords had enough. Their whispering turned to loud protest. Spear simply raised his

voice to overpower them “Therefore, to bring peace and prosperity to the Empire, all hereditary positions are henceforth abolished.” A representative took out his shoe and began banging it on the table. Other lords joined him in doing the same. Spear read even louder “All lords in Gemeinplatz will be replaced with governors appointed by the Chancellor with approval from His Imperial Majesty. To solve the problem of slave uprisings, slavery will be abolished in the Empire, effective immediately at the publishing of this decree. All darkskins, to not let their inferior minds be let astray, will be given employment in Imperial labor facilities and concentrated in camps far away from human settlement where they will be Imperial property. To ensure swift action and unity during such great change, the authority of the Diet will be transferred over to the Chancellor.”

One lord stood up to have his say “This is outrageous, this is unfair! The Diet will not accept this!”

Spear put the decree down on the table “This decree has already been signed by the emperor, and His Imperial Majesty doesn’t require your permission to enact Imperial decrees. I am the Diet. I have been the Diet since yesterday, when His Imperial Majesty signed this decree.”

“You-”

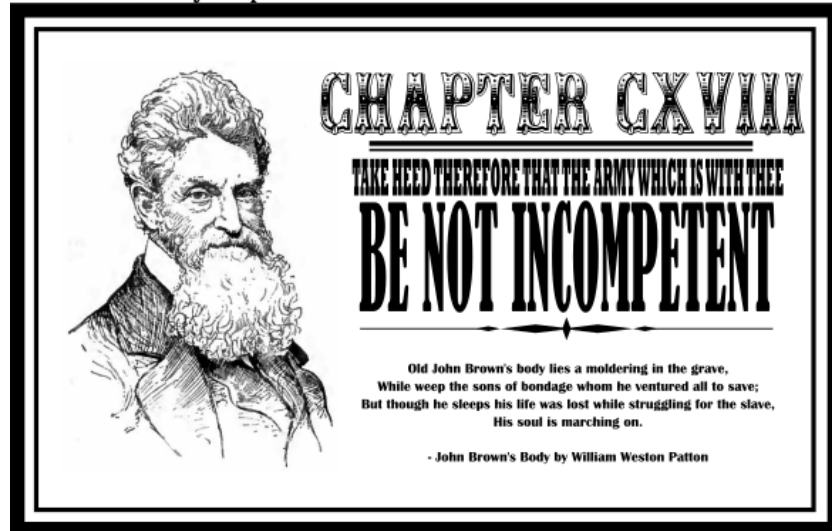
“This also means that, with His Imperial Majesty’s permission, I may reassign you from your positions. I already did so yesterday.” Spear clapped his hands, which summoned a group of men in black uniform who had steel helmets and spears shaped like rifles from Spear’s world. “Gentlemen, meet the Protection Squadron who are tasked with protecting the Chancellor. Protection Squadron, please arrest these intruders who have no authority being here.” Amongst shouts and insults, the men of the Protection Squad easily apprehended the unarmed members of the Imperial Diet. Weapons were forbidden in the hallowed halls of the Grey Palace after all, save for those with Imperial authority. Spear smiled at his captive audience. He had been waiting for this moment for a long while.

“In order to ensure our security and continuing stability, the Empire will be reorganized into the New Empire, for a safe and secure society. You incompetent, inbred fools have no place with the new order.”

The Empire was dead, “long live the Empire!” decreed Spear.

Chapter 124: Chapter CXVIII – Take heed therefore that the army which is with thee be not incompetent.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 118



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

16th of Autumn 5859 Imperial Highway №04-750, Aroghlie (Zon'guldac)

It was a calm morning down in the highway right outside of the dwarven city of Aroghlie. Mount Curry, the part of it that had snaked all the way over yonder, dwarfed the dwarves that were marching next to it. It was a small platoon, not because the number of men in it were small, but because the men in it were small.

A certain Captain Blackbeard, named after the fact that she had a white beard and her family loved irony, was at the head of these troops. Unlike many military officers in Gemeinplatz, she was walking on foot alongside the troops. The underground environment of Aroghlie simply didn't provide ample space for equestrian activity, so she and her dwarven comrades had never learnt how to ride a horse. Mounts were for those knife-ears and tall-men who loved living and travelling on the surface for some odd reason. Blackbeard certainly didn't love doing so – the sun irritated her eyes, the grass smelled funny, and it was way too cold for comfort. "Let's just stab these knife-ears and be done with" she thought out loud.

To answer to her was an aide which had been marching right next to her "We really got the short stick by having the Council assign us here."

Blackbeard could only let out an annoyed sigh "I had joined the election for a military office role thinking that nothing would happen as usual. What luck it is that we all got the short elven stick! I get paid way too little for this..."

The aide's head jolted sideways in shock "You get paid?!"

"A few coins, yes." Blackbeard turned her head around to look at the soldiers following her. They were a mess of colors and weaponry, and their marching formation resembled more a drunken snake than a military force of any repute. "What I get paid is barely enough for keeping this platoon

a float, I'm afraid." She missed the few weeks where she had gotten to idle while she ate and drank with her stipend. Sure, she could have spent that money on arming her troops, but who could blame her for thinking that the peace preserved since time immemorial wouldn't be broken? The foolish thing would have been to waste money worrying about what was back then the impossible prospect of war, she thought. Even now they hadn't seen any elves. For what she knew, the whole war and proclamation were a giant Imperial prank being played on them.

"Captain, let's turn around. I think we're at the end of our patrol route" the aide said, arriving at an arbitrary point that seemed good enough to stop at.

"Oh? Yes, yes, turn..." Blackbeard suddenly stopped.

"Captain?" The aide followed Blackbeard's gaze to see a big, blurry group of people in the distance. They had green banners held up high, and there were a scary number of banners being held up by a scary number of people.

"I think that's the green elves of the elves. No self-respecting dwarf would use green." Blackbeard was paralyzed for a few seconds. There they were: the enemy. The damnable knife-ears, those tree-huggers, they who had ne'er touched a forge in their life.

"Captain?" The aide's helpless plea shook Blackbeard awake.

"Oh, they-" Retreat behind the walls? No, they were too far away. "The- the only choice is for us to act like dwarves. We'll route these tree-lovers back to where they came from!" Blackbeard looked behind her. Her comrades didn't seem all too enthused to fight "Come on, we're going to die here!"

Dying didn't seem all too pleasant, so the mob of militiamen behind Blackbeard broke out of their marching column to a big old mess. That big old mess eventually coalesced into something that maybe resembled a line if one was to squint enough. Whoever had gotten most unlucky had been pushed to the front with their knees shaking, and the lucky ones stayed back in hopes that the elves would give up before the dwarven frontline did.

Quickly the elves came into view. They were on horseback, as could be understood from the giant cloud of smoke that their rides were kicking up. Blackbeard, being a proficient smith like any other dwarf, could identify that most of them were wearing bronze armor. So uncivilized were the elves that they had shunned the fine sides of life such as steel. The dwarven troops looked a bit more confident as they held their steel weaponry tight. "Come on, these guys won't be able to trample us children of the mountain," shouted Blackbeard.

Then the horses of the elves got closer, and closer, until the dwarves were face-to-face with animals who were thrice as tall as them, with no spears and pikes to defend against the raging beasts. Blackbeard saw a fellow child of the mountain get trampled right next to her, and another horse almost kicked her in the face before she managed to slash at its ankle with her sword. The elven cavalry hit the dwarven line like a brick tossed at a window, shattering them completely. Steel armaments turned out to be quite useless against a horse – a dwarf died the same when a horse trampled them right on the chest whether they wore a cuirass or not. Bronze still tore through skin the same.

Captain Blackbeard had no chance to call for a retreat as all the dwarves dispersed to save their own skin, though that proved futile as the cavalry followed to cut down anyone retreating. The elves would only need to spend a few more minutes riding forward to reach Aroghlie itself.

17th of Autumn 5859
Right outside the walls of Aroghlie, Aroghlie (Zon'guldac)

Supreme Chieftainess and Marchioness Tinatin Leafblower took a deep breath and looked outside the entrance of her tent. Around her were countless elves, from what were once feuding clans, united in sieging down the damnable dwarven city. All under one green banner – her banner. All those archers, the cavalymen, the infantry... it was all hers. The glory of taking the city too would be hers. So would the name of the city's conqueror be hers. Her eyes followed up and up, to the top of the dwarven walls towering over them. Certainly, these walls looked intimidating, but they'd do nothing when the dwarves were starving and they came begging to her for mercy. Even then that wasn't enough. Just waiting around for a siege, doing nothing, what was she waiting for? That'd just invite someone nosy to come in and lift the siege. Leafblower had a little something, a little glint of bronze that she saw in the distance of her vision, though she was distracted by someone before she could behold her future.

“Madame.” A man in black uniform and steel helmet approached her. He gave an odd salute, one where he raised his arms straight up with all his fingers stretched out, which prompted Leafblower to look at him as if he came from an alien planet.

“What sort of greeting is that? Are you making fun of me?”

“No, madame, this is the new Imperial Salute that His Imperial Majesty has ordered all Imperial troops to use. Our Chancellor gave us from the Protection Squadron to be extra diligent with the salutes.” The PS trooper took out a sealed letter and handed it to Leafblower “This is a signed decree confirming your appointment as Marchioness under the new Imperial order. Just some standard protocol, nothing to worry about.”

“I wasn't asking your opinion on whether I had anything to worry about.” Leafblower took the letter into her hands and promptly handed it to a servant passing by to stash somewhere. “How are things in the capital?”

“A few troubles here and there, but the Protection Squadron has been working tirelessly to arrest those scheming against His Imperial Majesty and Our Chancellor. The biggest problem has been taking slaves all over the Empire and concentrating them. You know those darkskins, they can get quite uppity.”

“I don't know about darkskins much, but I do know about the dark elves. If they're similar, you're better off getting rid of them entirely” advised Leafblower without a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

“I- I think that'd be quite bloody and unnecessary, no?” Leafblower didn't answer the trooper's question. He felt a chill run down his spine, which was enough for him to give a bow and bid farewell. “S-see... uhm... Have a nice siege, madame!”

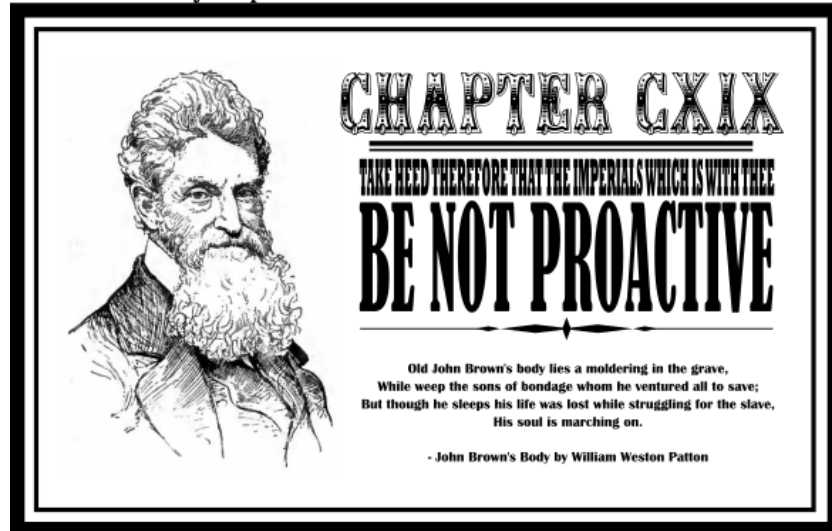
“You too” replied Leafblower. She paused, realized her mistake, and then proceeded not to care as she ventured out of her tent to inspect her fine pieces of work: a dozen cannons, cast from fine elven bronze, lined up facing the walls of Aroghlie. Under the gaze of the morning sun their surfaces shone a fine brown. She stopped a newly-promoted cannoneer elf making rounds around one cannon “How long until you're ready to fire?”

The cannoneer froze in shock and gave a salute “Oh, madame! We’ve just received the shipment of gunpowder from the Imperials. We’ll be ready to fire later today.”

“Good, excellent. These old walls won’t stand up to elven bronze.” Leafblower patted one cannon affectionately. Soon the walls of Casamonu would be no more.

Chapter 125: Chapter CXIX – Take heed therefore that the Imperials which is with thee be not proactive.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 119



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

19th of Autumn 5859 A cave that isn't Libertycave, Karabush

Karabush, the province right next to the rebels over at Casamonu, seemed as calm as ever under the cover of night. It was total silence, with the cicadas having retreated after summer, only the soft whistling of wind making its way through the trees and hills.

Tubman was up on a hill, watching the city of Karabush. The city itself was only lit up by lanterns hung from watchtowers. From such a distance she could only see faint dots of light reaching her eyes. "Seems calm today as well."

"Emphasis on *seems*," replied Kyauta, who had been sitting right next to Tubman.

"I am pretty certain they aren't staying calm behind those walls. Those people can't be staying idle while a slave revolt is brewing right next to them." Tubman turned around from the city to the entrance of their hideout: a cave. It had taken Tubman and co. a few days of travel and scouting to find this excellent hideout. "Let's not stay idle either. We have places to burn."

Kyauta and Tubman went through the entrance of the cave which was darker than dark. They navigated further inside by sticking close to the walls, touching the stone with their hands to make sure they were going the right way. Soon enough, they were in a small space lit by a lantern borrowed from Casamonu. Sitting around the lantern were a few familiar figures to Tubman, veterans from the League of Gileadites whom she had picked specially for their stealth, along with a few strangers that they had rescued from the slavers of Karabush. Most of them were quiet, mostly as they hadn't gotten over the shock of their newfound liberty, while the ones who spoke were wondering when they'd be let out the cave. Tubman's voice rang out throughout the walls of the cave "Good night, folks. I hope that you are doing well." She began reciting the speech that she

had recited many a time before “We’ll be getting you across the border tomorrow, may the Lord help us across this journey, to Casamonu. It’s a free city ran by our people, and I advise that you stay there, but we’ll help you if you wish to make your way to Zon’guldac.”

One shaky fugitive raised his hand “Uhm, madame, this sounds quite dangerous. Can we return back to-”

Tubman tapped at the axe hung by her waist. “If you wish to return to your master, I’ll return you to your Maker.”

“U-understood, madame.”

“Good, I’m glad that you got it so quickly.” Tubman unsheathed her axe anyways, which looked quite scary when she was under such dim light. “Now, are we ready to save a few more souls?”

19th of Autumn 5859 **A plantation, Karabush**

Karabush, the province right next to the rebels over at Casamonu, seemed as calm as ever under the cover of night. It was total silence, except for Tubman speaking in a hushed tone “I’ll go forward first.”

Under the dim moonlight Tubman rushed forward, avoiding stepping on branches and mud to be as quiet as possible, and slowly a big black square revealed itself in front of her. Tubman wished in times like these that she was a catgirl. Then she could have easily seen in the dark. Still, through years of experience, she didn’t need to be a catgirl to do her job. That big black square was the main building, the residence of the master and the overseers, there was a fence around it that looked like a series of thin, small black rectangles. The slave quarters were somewhere behind those fences, usually pretty close to the main building as to not let slaves be too far from supervision. Tubman raised her hand after seeing no overseers, and her small group followed her in jumping through the fence. There was no light coming out of the windows of the main building, nor anywhere in the compound, so it seemed that everyone was asleep.

Tubman and co. dispersed, looking everywhere for where slaves may be. They weren’t in that one building, or that other one, and by the end everyone had looked everywhere to not see a single soul. “General, did you accidentally lead us into an abandoned place?” asked Kyauta.

“No, there were people here. I checked it yesterday.” Tubman looked around her uneasily. The darkness was a neutral side in this conflict. It hid them as well as anyone who might be planning on setting up an “Ambush?”

A loud *crash* was heard from the main building. Then footsteps.

“Disperse! We’re being ambushed!” With Tubman’s command, everyone took positions wherever they could find cover. The footsteps got closer and closer.

Out came... just one man? “H-Hello?” He was armed with a kitchen knife that shone under the moonlight. His legs were shaking and his voice was quivering.

“Hello?” Tubman popped up from behind the bush she was hiding in. “Who are you? Where is everyone?”

“Huh? A fellow darkskin? I thought I was about to be gotten by the Imperials...” The man dropped his knife and fell to his knees out of relief.

Tubman too lowered her axe “Why would the Imperials get you? You aren’t a fugitive, no?”

“No, I’m not, but some guys – with black armor, odd spears... I believe they were Imperials, they at least said that they were working on order of the Emperor, they rounded the slaves up and told the master that we were Imperial property now. I hid in a bale of hay in the stable, and they never found me.”

“That’s...” Tubman thought of what might have happened. Perhaps the owner of this plantation had wronged the Imperials somehow? Even then, taking away the “property” of an aristocrat seemed quite aggressive. “Do you know where the Imperials took the others away?”

“I have no clue. I was busy hiding by that time if they told anything about that.”

20th of Autumn 5859

The cave that isn’t Libertycave, Karabush

The sun was slowly rising over Gemeinplatz. By the time the first rays of sunlight began hitting the surface, Tubman had hiked her way back up to their hideout. She made her way back inside, where she found a dissatisfied Kyauta twiddling her thumbs, and nobody else. “Good morning, Kyauta.”

Kyauta slowly stood up, taking a while before she opened her mouth to speak. “Morning, General. As you can see, we didn’t manage to rescue anybody yesterday. Hopefully you’ve brought some better news?”

“Unfortunately, no. It seems that the Lord has other plans. We heard from one slave, the only one left behind, that his entire plantation had been evacuated by Imperial soldiers. He’s the only one we’ve managed to send to Casamonu.”

Kyauta was shocked. “We went around a few plantations, all of them were completely abandoned. Did the Imperials do that as well?”

Tubman nodded “We can’t be sure, but I think that’s probably it.” She took the lantern in the room “Let’s think outside with some fresh air.”

“Let’s.” Kyauta joined Tubman in taking a walk outside. “We should go back to Casamonu. There isn’t much for us to do here.”

“We still have to scout this area, to make sure...” Tubman’s eyes had caught something downhill. More specifically, a large gathering of men down below, near the city walls. “Duck!”

“What are they doing?” asked Kyauta.

Tubman went silent and spend a minute observing the gathering below. It was very large, somewhere around five thousand men she estimated. “They don’t have any siege weapons around the city, so they aren’t here to siege it down. They don’t seem to have built any tents or fortifications around them, so I don’t think they intend on staying here either. We didn’t see them yesterday, so they must have just marched in this morning. Let’s wait until they move.”

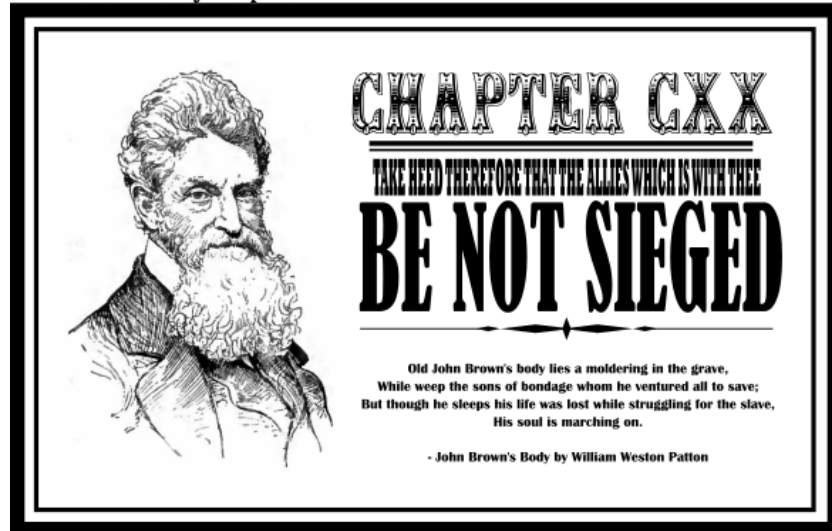
An hour passed, and then another, until the mass of men began moving in unison on the highway.

“And they are...” Kyauta watched the group. It was impressive to see such a large mass from afar.

“That highway is the one we followed. They’re marching to Casamonu.” Tubman carefully slithered back, so did Kyauta, until they were comfortable standing back up again. “Now is the time to return to Casamonu. We’ve seen what we needed to see.”

Chapter 126: Chapter CXX – Take heed therefore that the allies which is with thee be not sieged.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 120



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

22nd of Autumn 5859 Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

Brown's office was unusually silent today. The only soul in the room was Lady Whitebeard, who was slouched on a sofa in the corner. No light came in through the windows of the office at this ungodly time of day, and the room was quite dark. The stone walls, the lonely room, the sulking dwarf, it certainly was a depressive location to be.

Brown suddenly barged into the room, followed by Tubman "...moment, we'll talk about that General Tubman. If..." His eyes fell on the corner dwarf who was menacingly sitting with her face in a million pieces. "...hello there, Miss Whitebeard. To what do we owe your presence?"

Whitebeard spoke to the wall, not even having the energy to turn her head towards Brown "The elves. I tried to return to Zon'guldac, and they were swarming around the dwarven city."

Tubman sat in front of Whitebeard, shifting a seat right in front of the dwarf. "Isn't Aroghlie heavily fortified? I've heard so from the fugitives who escaped there. It shouldn't fall easily."

"You'd think so, but you aren't a dwarf, Miss Tubman. You haven't been on the inside."

Whitebeard shifted up from the seat, remembering common etiquette. Her slouch was gone now, but she was sulking all the same "Aroghlie's walls are ancient. They look grand, but the Council has spent no budget on renovating them, so they rot on the inside. Same with the rest of our forces. When I got to the city, all I could hear was non-stop cannon fire, and us dwarves certainly don't have that many cannons ready."

"So?" Brown leaned on the sofa that Whitebeard was on "You've previously said that the dwarves could handle their own, and didn't request military assistance."

“We also didn’t expect that the elves would have cannons and Imperial prerogative to attack us. Times have changed, and I am here to pray for your help.”

Brown looked at Tubman. Tubman looked back at him, nodding. “I’m afraid that we have troubles of our own, Miss Whitebeard. An enemy army, with double the men of our own, at most two days away from Casamonu.”

“O-oh.” Whitebeard’s eyes and mouth stood open as if she couldn’t process what she had just heard. “Oh.”

Brown calmly paced around the room; his hands wrapped around his back. He looked out the window, towards the sun graciously provided by the Lord. Casamonu, and its walls, were right below him. “We did repair Casamonu’s walls, but we haven’t upgraded them at all. There hasn’t been enough time or resources to do so. Our men are underequipped, undertrained, and outnumbered. I believe that Providence threw this hurdle for us to overcome.”

“I more think that this Providence of yours wishes to crush us under a hurdle if that’s what they’re sending” replied Whitebeard. “Pray tell, how do you wish to overcome such odds, Mister Brown? How do you plan on fighting the army that’s coming here?”

“The same plan for when a greater army came to defeat us at the copper mines: I don’t. I don’t plan on fighting this army. One doesn’t make plans for what is clearly impossible.”

“So, you’ll just give up the city without a fight?” asked Whitebeard sarcastically.

“Yes” simply replied Brown. “Yes, we will.”

Whitebeard had to take a silent pause again “...I asked that as a joke.”

“I am serious.” Brown cleared his throat, ready for a long speech “We have done our job in this city. We have freed its many slaves from their masters, we have freed the citizens from their lords, we have freed the peasants from serfdom. I don’t think they’ll sit by idly while their old masters come back. The citizens of the city may have been against us out of a natural reaction against change, but they’ll resist against their old masters coming back with force. Even more than the resistance against us, in fact.”

Whitebeard took a long, disappointed breath “So, you’re going to have to leave the dwarves alone?”

Brown shook his head “No, no. We’ll welcome any and all refugees from Aroghlie into Libertycave. Unfortunately, that is all that we can do, unless you wish for us to fight a suicidal battle against the forces from Karabush. We’ll be better able to defend ourselves in the mountain, especially as the colder season approaches.”

“That is understandable, Mister Brown. We all have our own people to protect.” Whitebeard stood up from the sofa and took her warhammer that she had left leaning on the wall “If you’ll excuse me, I’ll try and salvage who I can from Aroghlie.”

“You are excused, Miss Whitebeard.” With that, Whitebeard left the office with a polite bow.

“You aren’t excused, Mister Brown” interjected Tubman “We have an evacuation to plan.”

“May God help us; this will be a long night. Let us begin.”

22nd of Autumn 5859
A fancy bedroom, Casamonu

Clank, chunk! Pitter patter, thud!

“Wah... what the... what’s the ruckus for!?” Shakira jolted out the bed, jumping for her sword. She instead ended up hitting a bedside table and falling flat on the ground.

“Miss Shakira, you’re awake!” It was Azra, running towards her guest “We just got orders to evacuate, get up, please!”

“Wah?” Shakira felt like her head was being pounded on by a drummer. Perhaps it was the table, perhaps it was the drink from last night... perhaps both. “Both? Right, I visited Azra’s house last night, and...”

“...and now you’re here, come on, we have no time for deep thoughts Miss Shakira!” Azra picked Shakira up and let the adventurer rest on her shoulders. Meanwhile she was also ordering the maid, “Make sure to pack up that sword, and her clothes, oh and also...”, and trying to stay balanced with the woman leaning on her. “Alright, slow and steady, slow and steady...”

Shakira, half-conscious, followed Azra to somewhere. She couldn’t tell. Her consciousness only returned once she sat down and realized that she was inside a horse carriage. “Uh, what’s happening?”

Azra sat without saying a word, catching her breath. She slowly returned to Ifie “We’re escaping to Libertycave. Most of Casamonu is. There’s an army coming, and I don’t think they’ll have mercy on our souls. ‘Villains ne’er have mercy’, as one play goes. Do you know that one?”

“N-no, I’ve never watched a play, at least not the fancy kind that a lady like you would have seen.”

“No? It’s quite a classic you know, the Tragedy of the Wise...”

Shakira snapped her finger “That’s it, I remember what happened last night! I fell asleep while you were yapping about literature.”

“It’s not ‘yapping’, Miss Shakira, ‘literature is the soul of mankind’!”

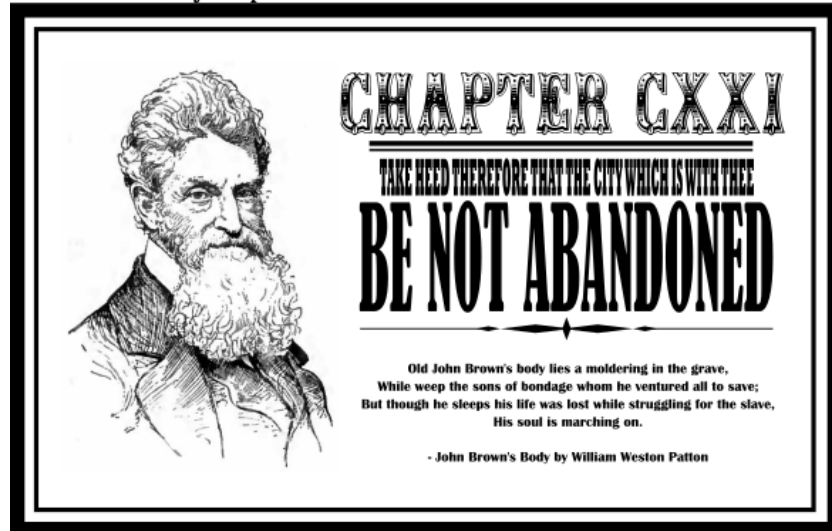
“Whatever.” Shakira, unable to find interesting company, looked outside the window of the carriage. They were on the streets of the city, and it was quite crowded with a dense flow of people and horses. All had bags, sacks and barrels strapped on them in an effort to move as much as possible. “Is nobody staying behind?”

“I don’t think so” commented Azra. She was now looking out of the windows as well “I imagine we’re all traitors according to the Empire, all of us who remain alive alongside fugitives.”

Shakira shrugged “We live in interesting times.” She yawned, closing her eyes again. At least the carriage was stable enough to get some sleep in...

Chapter 127: Chapter CXXI – Take heed therefore that the city which is with thee be not abandoned.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 121



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

25th of Autumn 5859 A field outside of Casamonu City, Casamonu

Mayor Azvaran Earlywatch of Karabush was on his horse, overlooking the army who was marching with him. It was a grand one, over five thousand strong, so grand that its likes hadn't been seen around the border regions since time immemorial. It stretched along the highway like an enormous snake made of metal and men. Their goal was simple: "Let's get this slave rebellion over with today."

"As I have said many times sir, we must be careful" replied the man right next to the mayor. He looked foreign to Gemeinplatz, not as foreign as an otherworlder but foreign nonetheless, with blonde hair that looked way out of place and a tall fur hat with several plumes sticking out of it in a conspicuous fashion. While many found his style ridiculous, nobody would dare mess with a man like him who had a few open scars sitting right on his face. It was Evelyn Gorkiewicz de Habdank, a mercenary captain from lands far away to the Empire. His troops composed most of the mayor's forces. What the Three Cities, a loose union of Karabush, Bolipoli and Changra, lacked in military might they made up with numismatic might.

"I know, hence why I brought the biggest military force this part of Gemeinplatz has seen. My cousin, Baha, was routed by these rebels." Azvaran omitted the part where his cousin rebelled against the rightful count of Casamonu and paid ransom to fugitives. Habdank didn't need to know that little detail. "Savages they may be, they fight well from what I've heard."

"If they have managed to defeat your lords, then I'm at least pretty certain that they aren't savages. I look forward to fighting them."

Azvaran briefly opened his mouth, stopped, and then reluctantly nodded at Habdank's statement. "It's a shame that the Empire has come to this."

“It means more work for me, so I can’t complain.” Indeed, Habdank couldn’t, considering that he was getting a premium to be dragged all the way here.

“It means more work for me, so I *can* complain” said Azvaran, adding a drawn-out groan to the end. “Look at what happened at Casamonu, all the chaos... The fugitives have raided Karabush too, though thankfully the Chancellor’s order brought an end to that. Clever that guy is, I’m not too mad at him rounding up all the chair-warmers. I’d have done so much earlier if I had the authority.”

“I heard about the proclamation. A friend, a captain from another mercenary company, was paid a generous sum to put down a few rebellions near the capital.” Habdank had wished to get such an easy job, but then the pay was pretty good here in Karabush, so he couldn’t complain at the end.

“We might have to keep you around to do the same in Casamonu. Only the Divine knows how much of a pain it’s going to be to establish order back in the county... At least, it’ll be worth it to erase such a shame on our house.” Azvaran also didn’t need to mention how nice it’d be to have another county under his influence.

With such idle conversation the army of Karabush rode forth, passing... nobody. “Have the fugitives slaughtered all the peasants?” asked Azvaran as the army passed yet another abandoned village. The houses were still intact, as if they had been left yesterday, and a few unharvested crops still remained on the fields. It was eerie, enough to run a shiver up the mayor’s spine, thinking about what sort of mass killing must have occurred for everyone to have disappeared from rural Casamonu. More and more villages popped up as they got closer to the city, yet there were no souls to be seen. The army looted what few crops they could on the way, as was standard conduct for warfare in Gemeinplatz.

Eventually Casamonu itself showed up on the horizon. It’s walls, old yet respectable, towered over the men who had already mentally settled down for a long siege. A messenger from the army of Karabush ran towards the walls with a white flag, shouting “The mayor of Karabush extends his mercy to you if you surrender now... hello. Hello? Is there anyone up there?” No response. The walls were empty.

Azvaran was baffled “Is this some sort elaborate of trap?”

Habdank too found himself confused “I’ll get the sappers to break open the gate.”

With Habdank’s orders a group of men carrying carpentry tools, such as saws and axes, marched forth and began chipping at one of the grand wooden gates that served as an entrance into the walls. Normally these sappers would get paid double as they risked life and limb to breach the walls and pioneer attacks during sieges, but this time the only thing threatening them was boredom and confusion. It took an hour, where the army of Karabush sat around and watched, before a man-sized hole was torn through the gate.

The sappers entered through the breach, finally expecting that they’d be shot at to earn their pay, but no. There wasn’t anybody to shoot at them, or greet them, or anybody in general to do anything. Casamonu seemed like it had died a sudden death, and the army of Karabush had now arrived for the autopsy.

“Perhaps they are hiding in Castle Casamonu, over there.” Azvaran helpful pointed at the top of the hill where the castle could clearly be seen.

“I doubt that they’d abandon these enormous walls just to retreat to an old castle without a fight. Be careful-” Habdank’s words were interrupted by his horse tripping on a tight rope that had been lain on the ground, blocking the road. He was about to utter a curse, but that too was interrupted by an explosion that occurred near where they entered. “What the-”

“An ambush... no, a simple trap!” There were no enemies to be seen still, but turning back, Azvaran saw a giant mess of men on the ground and destroyed road work mixed in together. “They must have somehow rigged the road with gunpowder, watch out for any rope on the ground!” Thankfully the damage wasn’t as bad as the explosion made it sound, most men were shaken up or injured rather than dead, but it did its job of making sure that they marched slowly to watch their step, packing them tightly.

Habdank suddenly stopped his horse “Another rope. Men, be careful!” Even more slowly the army jumped to the other side of the road, and after a stressful few minutes, the men made it to the other side while their comrades waited for them. The rope was still intact. “Phew. We managed to avoid th-” Again, Habdank was rudely interrupted by an explosion, this one much larger than the last one. Azvaran and Habdank managed to avoid being injured thanks to being in the front, but their man at the back were again lying in pain as the fire and smoke of the gunpowder slowly petered out to reveal the damage. A whole lot more men were injured or dead thanks to being so tightly packed together, perhaps a thousand of them made not for action in a brief moment. Suddenly, Habdank realized that such cartoonish rope traps weren’t possible, unless “they must still have somebody in here lighting the explosives under the road, the rope is just a distraction!”

“Then we must find the perpetrator!” exclaimed Azvaran.

“No, there are far too many buildings to search, and who knows how much time we’d waste looking for someone who has already done their job. If it’s one or two people, then it’ll be like searching for a needle in a haystack. We should instead march in a dispersed formation so that an explosion cannot do much damage. They can’t have much more gunpowder at the ready, especially since they seem to have evacuated in a hurry.” Habdank’s assumption proved true as there were no more explosions on the path to the castle.

Surprisingly, when they arrived at the castle, there was someone at the gate. A few were atop the walls in fact. The nobleman at the top of the gate shouted “Greetings sirs, from Yaz Inkwell of Casamonu. The fugitives all left the city, leaving us loyal few. We thank you for liberating our city!” The gates of the castle opened, letting the army of Karabush march in.

Sir Inkwell ran down to greet the mayor. “Oh sir, we have been waiting for the likes of you for a long time! The fugitives... they’re savage bunch, plotting the downfall of the Empire and all that’s good.”

Habdank raised a brow in suspicion “If that’s true, how are you and the people around you alive? Wouldn’t you have been killed by these fugitives?”

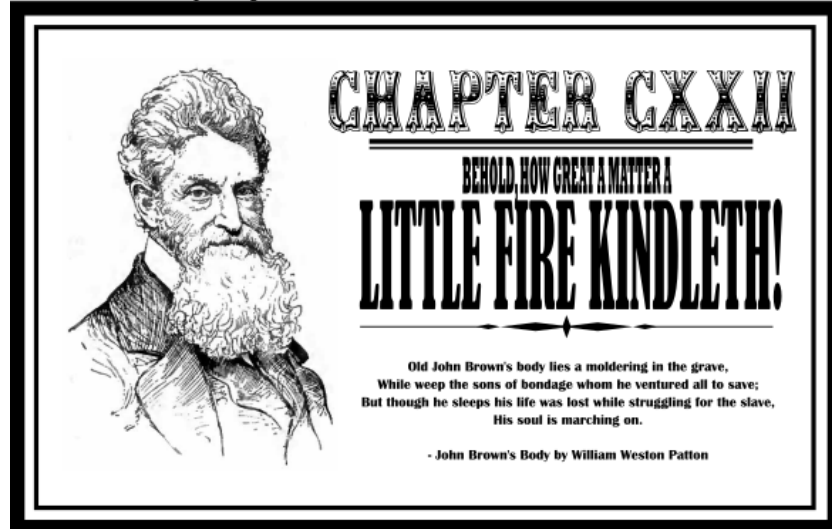
“Uhm... well, they did show mercy and not kill us? They even let me be elected mayor and-”

Azvaran, not in the mood for being trusting after having met with a few traps on the way, simply replied “I don’t believe you. This is way too ridiculous.” He turned to his army and simply ordered “Lock the people in the castle away.”

It seemed that loyalty to the Empire had not paid off for Sir Inkwell.

Chapter 128: Chapter CXXII – Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 122



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

26th of Autumn 5859 Copperworks, Libertycave

The copperworks, the heart of Libertycave, found itself even more crowded than usual today. Not because there was much copperwork to do, in fact the copperwork had paused work to help with the evacuation, but because there was much of other work to do. Libertycave was back in its natural, donut-like state, with a small gathering of people surrounding a smaller gathering in the middle. In the middle were the Commander-in-Chief, John Brown, captains of the army, and a few curious onlookers who had decided to get close. The air was oppressive, mostly because of how crowded the building was, and also because of how tense everyone was. The celebratory air around the victory in Casamonu had seemingly floated up and disappeared to the ether it had miraculously descended from.

Silence reigned the makeshift council room, save for a few awkward coughs and the occasional chatter immediately stopped with a “sush, be quiet”. The council members themselves quietly exchanged a few quiet words, though nobody dared to speak up for a long while. The common folk gathered around were curious, and anxious to get proper answers as to what happened, but they didn’t dare speak much either.

Finally, the one to break the silence was a certain Rabanowicz barging into the council “Apologies for my tardiness, it was hard to gather all these together.” The “these” in question was a big stack of papers that had been frantically scribbled on, and she left them on a table with a loud “thud!” that gathered everybody’s attention. “I have news. Good, bad, mostly... all important.” She wasn’t an elected official or anything, but she had been called in as a professional “person who knows stuff and things”. “Let’s start with the good: our food should last until the end of winter. A lot seems to have been stockpiled during the raids to plantations. With resourceful and careful rationing, I calculate that nobody should starve for another ninety days in Libertycave.”

“The bad news, Doctor Rabanowicz?” asked Brown, his old face looking a bit more wrinkled than usual even if he sounded calm.

“The bad news is that nobody should starve for another ninety days. Add a day or two if we can harvest some of those slimes on the mountain, but I don’t think we’re going to be able to sustain ourselves just off of that. If the enemy sieges us down, which they seem determined to defeat us if they’ve brought along such a large army, then we’ll be forced to break out lest we are defeated by hunger. Even if we break out, a lot of the peasants are here with us right now. I don’t think many of the crops will be grown when we break out.”

Brown nodded “I’ll have to agree that we’ll most likely be put under siege.”

“So, do we have to try breaking out now? It doesn’t seem like we have much choice, better do it sooner rather than later” said Ayomide.

“No, we have a time to prepare. There’s a lot of people, to say the least, that are currently in Libertycave. A lot of people who’d rather be back home and will fight for it. We’ll have even more people, experienced smiths, when Miss Whitebeard makes her way back with the dwarven refugees.”

Tubman interjected “I want to add that we aren’t completely trapped here. Mount Curry is a vast place, with many routes and caves that are off the beaten path, ones that me and the others explored and mapped thoroughly. It’s not possible to move large amounts of people, there is a reason nobody travels through those places, but sneaking in goods should be possible. Perhaps some food, or metal for the smiths to work on?”

Now it was turn for Mayor Bilal “Speaking of smiths, the copperwork did manage to produce some steel yesterday with the help of the advisors that the dwarves sent us. It was low-quality, and took great pains to construct the furnace needed to produce it, but I believe that we are close to being able to make proper equipment. We had to pause any steel production since my men are currently busy helping construct housing for the refugees, but, with the dwarven refugees helping us, I think we’ll be able to switch the copperworks to steel production as long as General Tubman helps us out with getting iron and coal.”

“I’ll see what I can do” replied Tubman. Prospecting for ore wasn’t exactly her specialty, but she had done missions much more impossible before. “I’ll contact the few people that I have in other cities and see if they can help out.”

The council room seemed a whole lot tense, now that the situation didn’t seem all hopeless. Brown raised his voice as everyone around him seemed to have concluded speaking “Keep in mind that this isn’t the toughest times we’ve faced yet. Thank the Lord, we started as a dozen fugitives in a cave that is now a city of more than a ten thousand free men. Right now, with all the people that we’ve gathered, we’re at our strongest yet. Not that we should rest easy, definitely not, for the Devil is always hard at work. But! Providence has given us great fortune gentlemen, never forget that, and I assure you that we’ll break out of this mountain stronger than we were forced to retreat into it!” He was met with cheers, with the renewed spirit of the free men who had fought so hard up until now.

“If you say that this devil of yours is hard at work, and I believe we have spoken enough, then let us all retreat to do our business. I think, considering what wondrous things we have already achieved, we will do well.” Rabanowicz got up from her seat, followed by others in the copperworks.

So it was, on the 26th of Autumn, Libertycave was back on the warpath. It had no plows to beat into swords, but it had the spirit of its countless free people to lead them forward to a new future.

26th of Autumn 5859

Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

Back in Casamonu, a similar gathering was taking place between the news master of the city, Mayor Azvaran, and Habdank. Not that there was much left for him to be a master of: looking outside the window of the castle, Azvaran could only see a ghost town populated by his own men. The corpses of the men who had fallen victim to the traps of the fugitives hadn't even been cleaned off the streets yet, a constant reminder of mortality that loomed over everyone in what remained of Casamonu. His skygazing was interrupted by Habdank repeating a pressing question: "What do we do now, sir?"

"I would love to return to Karabush. There isn't much use in capturing a city that has nobody in it, but..." Azvaran looked at Mount Curry in the distance. The ever-looming mountain, one that was now proving a pain in his backside "...I promised the Chancellor that I'd defeat the slave rebellion. I don't believe he'll let me hold on to my position for long if I go against his orders."

"We're staying then?" Habdank certainly didn't mind. It just meant more work for him and his men.

"Yes, I will contact my steward to gather the funds necessary to hire your company for the next season at least." Azvaran hoped that he wouldn't have to keep mercenaries for much longer. "I don't plan on assaulting a mountain of all places in winter, and you rightfully would refuse such a suicidal operation, so I'll ask you and your men to put down unrest back in Karabush until the snow thaws or the fugitives surrender."

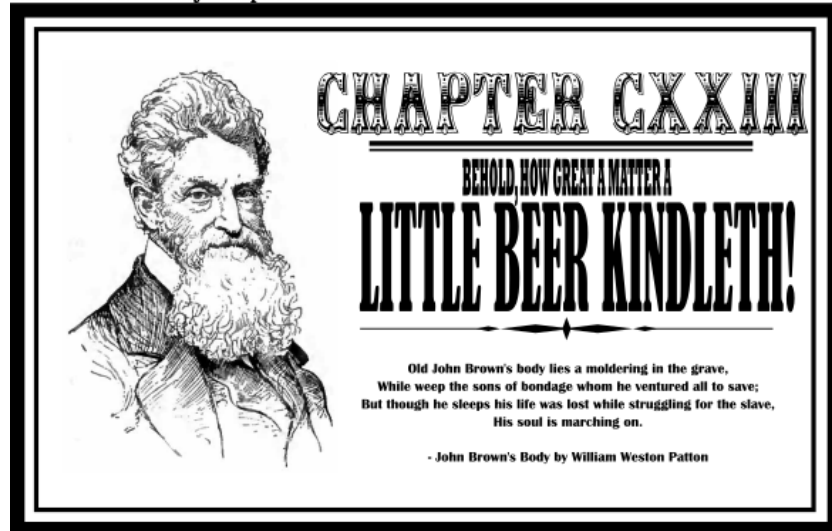
"With them having evacuated so many up the mountain, I believe the latter will happen first. Unless they planned for this and stocked up, in which case a cannon or two will deal with any defenses they may have and we can go on to assault their hideout. It will be risky, but from what the scouts from your host reported, they aren't armed well and they have fewer men than us."

"It's only a matter of waiting then." Azvaran relaxed his shoulders. There wasn't much to do now, other than maybe scrape up a few more soldiers to reinforce his forces for the assault, along with settling people from Karabush to Casamonu.

So it was, on the 26th of Autumn, Casamonu was eerily quiet. It had no plows to beat into swords, and no souls left to live in it.

Chapter 129: Chapter CXXIII – Behold, how great a matter a little beer kindleth!

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 122



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

29th of Autumn 5859
Aroghlie, Zon'guldac

"It's a shameful display, it really is." Lady Whitebeard was back home, to quite the expected surprise. Elves, elves everywhere on the streets, in the buildings, under dwarven rooves. They had let her in as she was a dwarf. There was nothing to suspect about a dwarf returning from a trading trip. The countless stone brick houses of the outdoors section of Aroghlie were boarded up, some demolished during the chaos, some standing resiliently as the had done so for thousands of years.



The stone of Aroghlie was mostly black, similar to coal in appearance but much more resilient than its cousin, and even clay bricks and other stones were painted black to match the slate rooves of the city. Now it made it hard to determine which buildings had been burnt down and which were still standing as Whitebeard passed by the mostly empty streets. The only ones she was passing by was the occasional elven soldier, who looked down on her with much derision. There was the occasional corpse shuffled to a back street, sometimes multiple, that nobody had bothered to pick up yet. Some corpses elven, most of them dwarven soldiers who hadn't done the best when on defense. Perhaps the lack of people was from all the conscripted dwarves who had been slaughtered during the siege, though Whitebeard wouldn't put her money on them having been brave enough for such a devastating last stand. That's how the dwarves had been defeated: not even having put up a fight competently enough to be narrated in the history books.

Whitebeard's defeated self-narration was suddenly interrupted by a familiar face. "Lady Barbarossa?" It was the Lord of Trade, the one who had sent Whitebeard on the mission to Casamonu.

"What a chance encounter, Miss Whitebeard. Unfortunately, I am just Barbarossa now. The Supreme Council unanimously voted to dissolve itself out of shame when the elves entered the city." The two women gave each other a salute, hands to the forehead and boots tapping on the ground which was perhaps the oddest form of salute practiced in Gemeinplatz practiced by the dwarves.

Whitebeard paused, not sure whether what she heard was right "...the Supreme Council was voting while the city fell? Explains why you're alive, then, if you surrendered without fighting."

"We had no choice, Whitebeard. You should've seen how their cannons tore our walls like they were made of paper. It would have been an utter massacre with the state our troops were in."

A sigh, a long and draw out one from Whitebeard, followed. "I guess I can't blame you... or anyone else. Nobody expected that the situation would change so quickly in the Empire, that peace

would be broken so suddenly and so violently. None of us had time to prepare.”

Barbarossa looked around her. Seeing nobody was around, she whispered “It isn’t over yet, we’ll kick these knife-ears out if that’s the last thing I do.”

“I’m here just for that” replied Whitebeard with a smile, and she continued with a cautious whisper “The fugitives of Casamonu wish to give refuge to dwarves, and their leader promised to help retake our city when they have gathered their strength. I’m here to take anyone who is willing to leave.”

“So, the dwarven race has fallen to asking for help from human fugitives, huh? I’m pretty sure almost everyone would be willing to make an escape, if it means not being under the Imperial boot.” Barbarossa chuckled with pity at herself and her kind.

“We’ll have to accept the help. The fugitives *have* won against the Imperials, unlike us here. Unless you wish to find your way up the mountain on your own and find your own band?”

“Definitely not, I’d not last long against the full dedicated force of the Empire, I’m afraid. Come, drinks are on me today, you won’t want to plan our escape while sober, do you?” Barbarossa tugged at Whitebeard’s sleeves.

Whitebeard happily obliged, following her new drinking buddy. “A good dwarf *never* does anything sober, though maybe I’ll try to not be more than tipsy tonight.”

**Uhm, what day was it again?
It’s like there’s a woodpecker pecking at my head... where are we?**

Whitebeard was... somewhere. She knew she was somewhere because everybody is somewhere all the time, that’s how it works. You can’t exactly be nowhere, in life or in death, whether you are standing or under the grave and-

“Whitebeard! What’s that blank stare, for goodness’ sake?!”

Oh, right, Whitebeard was somewhere. That somewhere was the streets of Aroghlie, at night, and she had an enormous gang of dwarves behind her. Right next to her was Barbarossa, and a few elves knocked unconscious, and... Oh dear, that was trouble, wasn’t it? Scratch that, that *is* trouble.

“Wh-where are I- we? Where we are?!” shouted Whitebeard.

“You don’t remember what you just did?! I shouldn’t have let you drink so much... We’re escaping!” shouted back Barbarossa.

“When?”

“It has been almost a week since you came here!”

“When?!”

“What does that question even mean?! Come on, let’s run!”

“O-okay?”

The tunnels, deep inside, that's where she needed to go. Whitebeard felt herself sobering up as the situation hit her like cold water to the face. Memories... Right, she had rambled to these dwarves while drunk, it ended up snowballing, and then some elves had gotten angry about it, they were beaten up, and now... "Right, right, let's go!"

41st of Autumn 5859
Libertycave, Mount Curry

"Phew... Somehow we're back again." Whitebeard, and her caravan of refugees, paused to take a breather right in front of the walls of Libertycave. Yes, there were walls now – no longer just a bunch of bricks dumped on a field, now they lined up like well-prepared soldiers and could take at least one shot of canon before collapsing (in theory).

The caravan of dwarves was drawing all attention from passersby, who stopped to gawk at this rare sight of a dwarven group outside of their mountain home. The dwarves were all loaded up with their belongings, carrying bags and sacks on their shoulders, though most of them had done the sane thing and carried a light load.

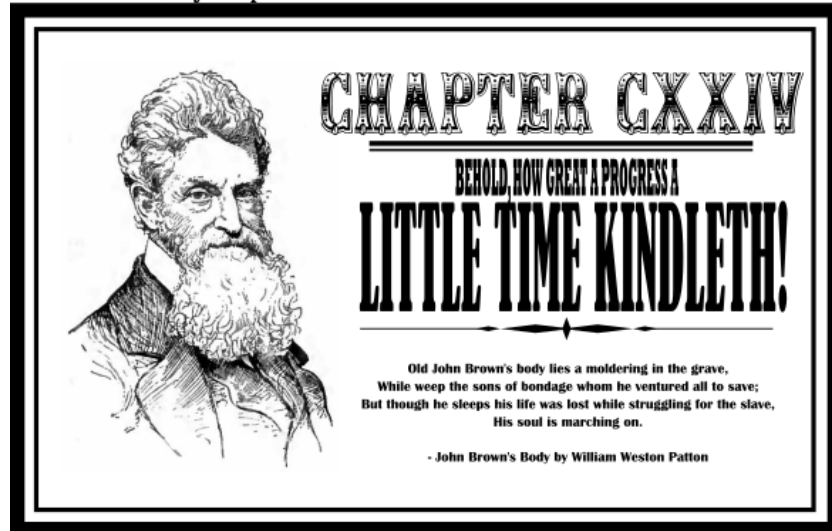
After their little break, Lady Whitebeard stepped forth to hail the guards in front of the gate. Oddly enough for Libertycave, they were carrying freshly-forged steel spears. Their copper helmets were still far from dwarven standards though. Allies they may be, Whitebeard did not like the prospect of fighting alongside such poorly equipped men. Things would have to change, and fast, with some expert dwarven help. "Greetings, I am Lady Whitebeard, bringing you a delivery of several hundred fresh dwarves. Take me to Mister Brown, if you could."

"A-alright, Lady Whitebeard... that, that is quite an impressive party" replied one of the guards. "The captain will probably notice your impressive party and be here in a moment now..."

Thus the dwarves arrived at Libertycave, to their temporary (?) home.

Chapter 130: Chapter CXXIV – Behold, how great a progress a little time kindleth!

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 124



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

49th of Autumn 5859 Libertycave, Mount Curry

Libertycave, despite its name coming from a cave where liberty certainly had happened, lacked caves except the one that Brown had stumbled upon. The cave had been important at one point considering it had housed the one and only resident of the settlement, John Brown, though now there were a whole lot more people (and still only one John Brown) who had long overshadowed the one cave in Libertycave.

Long gone were the little mud huts which once took weeks to figure out and construct for the green workers of Libertycave. Now the chimneys of the brickmakers billowed smoke all day long to make an endless array of bricks for the houses which were popping up like dandelions. They were tall dandelions at that; some of the braver architects of Libertycave had dared go up for a second floor. Members of the Glassmithing Guild of Casamonu had set up their shops relatively quickly, providing the view of the great outdoors from the convenience of the indoors to the lucky few who had snagged up the first panes of glass to be dragged out of the furnaces.

Ayomide herself was one of the lucky few glass-owners. She was enjoying her ownership on the second floor of her house where the view was clear. Good money had been paid for this view and Ayomide was going to make sure that she was going to get her money's worth of indoor-outdoor viewing time. Not to mention, she wanted to compensate for all the time where she was locked in the maid café with no sun to see. The cup of tilia tea in her hand warmed her up, she had spent way too much money on the window to get heating on the second floor, and it was as if the cold of Autumn wasn't there at all. Looking down she could see the streets of Libertycave. Yes, the *streets*. The road building projects outside of Libertycave had been cancelled, so the road builders had decided to move their business to inside the city. With a bit of city planning and road building, Libertycave was finally starting to look like other cities that Ayomide had seen - not an unorganized collection of buildings scattered around everywhere unlike how Libertycave used to be.

Ayomide idly wondered if “Libertycave” would continue being called the same name despite its lack of caves, though her idle thoughts were interrupted by the sound of footsteps rushing up the stairs “Ayomide! I have found it!” screamed Shinasi as he rushed up the stairs.

“What, you found the meaning of life or something? What’s the ruckus for?” Ayomide sipped her tea to calm down. Having somebody barge into your house and scream wasn’t exactly the most pleasant thing to experience when you were resting...

“Better than that, I have found donuts!” Shinasi rushed to where Ayomide was sitting and held both her hands “Do-nuts!”

Ayomide jumped up from her seat, shaking Shinasi’s hand vigorously with every word “Donuts... Y-you’re telling me that they are real?!”

“Not only are they real, we can get some right now!” Shinasi began walking Ayomide out of their house. “Come on, let’s go!”

“I-I guess I have nothing better to do.” replied Ayomide, though having dinner with Shinasi had been a thing she had wanted to do ever since that disappointing date attempt back in Casamonu.

Through the streets the pair went, and both realized at the same time just how crowded Libertycave felt all of a sudden. “You know, back in my day, it was me, the old man, and the bear pelt” commented Ayomide.

“The bear pelt? I don’t think it’d count as a denizen...” replied Shinasi, too focused on weaving through the crowd.

“It’s been here longer than you, I think it deserves some recognition.” Ayomide patted the pelt still on her, still hanging on after all this time. It’s not like there was anything much better than a literal bear’s pelt for insulation, after all.

“Yeah, but can a bear pelt hold your hand and lead you to donuts?” asked Shinasi with a cheeky smile on his face.

“Maybe, if I ask it nicely enough” replied Ayomide with an equally cheeky smile. Her smile disappeared when she almost bumped into a passerby “Sheesh, it sure is crowded. Maybe we should’ve just stayed as a dozen people in a cave...”

“Eh, we can move out of here once this is all over. To a quieter place, hopefully.”

The pair went up and up the street, climbing a little hill. Ayomide was getting a bit confused, considering that they were heading out of the city, and the houses (alongside the street, giving way to a simple gravel path) were slowly disappearing. “Where are these donuts that you speak of? They are not in a dungeon now, are they?”

“No, just a bit far away. You see the side of the cliff over there?” Shinasi pointed to the cliff, where Ayomide noticed a few holes and doors that she definitely hadn’t seen there before.

Ayomide exclaimed, in surprise “What are those?! Mole people, or something like that? When did we get them in here?”

“First of all, mole people are just a baseless rumor. I have never seen them in all my adventures. Secondly, yeah, we do basically have mole people now. The dwarves, didn’t you notice them arriving?”

Ayomide shook her head “No... I mean, yes, but I assumed they’d stay in houses like everyone else.”

Shinasi looked at Ayomide with disbelief “Ayomide, do you not know much about dwarves? They’re famous for living inside a mountain. That’s their whole thing.”

“I just assumed that they were like small people...” Ayomide watched as a dwarf, almost tall as her, passed by.

Shinasi watched the dwarf pass by too, and then he turned his eyes back to Ayomide “...I’m wondering if you are a catgirl-dwarf hybrid, Ayomide.”

Ayomide gave a jab right on the sides of Shinasi “Shush! I’d be way hairier if I was.”

“Ow-” Shinasi had to admit one thing: the dwarf catgirl packed some heft behind her punches. “Ow, ow... You’re plenty hairy already” he put his hand on Ayomide’s head, and ruffled her hair a bit, and the other hand held her tail “see?”

“You’d be dead right now if not for promising me a donut.” Ayomide didn’t make an attempt to escape as her hair was thoroughly ruffled by Shinasi on their way to a hole in the cliff. Actually, it wasn’t much of a hole, more of a quite spacious outdoors area carved on to the side of the cliff, with the seating simply being uncarved bits of stone that had been flattened for sitting. There was a sign on the side, one written in Latin script which both of them could read by now: “Holemaker Ironside’s Donut Hole”.

“That is indeed a hole, yes” replied Ayomide to the sign she just read. There was a window of sorts carved into the shop, from which smoke was coming out of it along with a delicious, sugary smell. “Quite a nice hole, in fact.”

“Better than most dungeons I’ve been to at least. Most dungeons smell of mold, not sugar.” Shinasi approached the dwarf wearing an apron standing behind the window. “Good morning. Uhh, donut?”

“Can’t you read the sign at the front? I’ve got nothing but donuts. The freshest donuts, the best donuts. My family’s been doing this since my otherworlder ancestor from long ago taught them how!” The dwarf smacked a tray of donuts so fresh that they had smoke coming off of them, not to mention how soft their dough looked. “So, how much would you like?”

Shinasi turned to Ayomide. She had four of her fingers held up. He took a deep gulp and turned back to the dwarf. “Five, please.”

“Aye.” Shinasi received a threatening-looking stack of five donuts, and he had to make an equally threatening payment in money for that much snackage.

“I guess I’m not going out drinking tomorrow” lamented Shinasi as he placed the stack on a “table”, which like the seats as uncarved stone shaped like a table. Ayomide took four of the donuts, Shinasi took one, and both of them bit into the sugary dough circles with great anticipation.

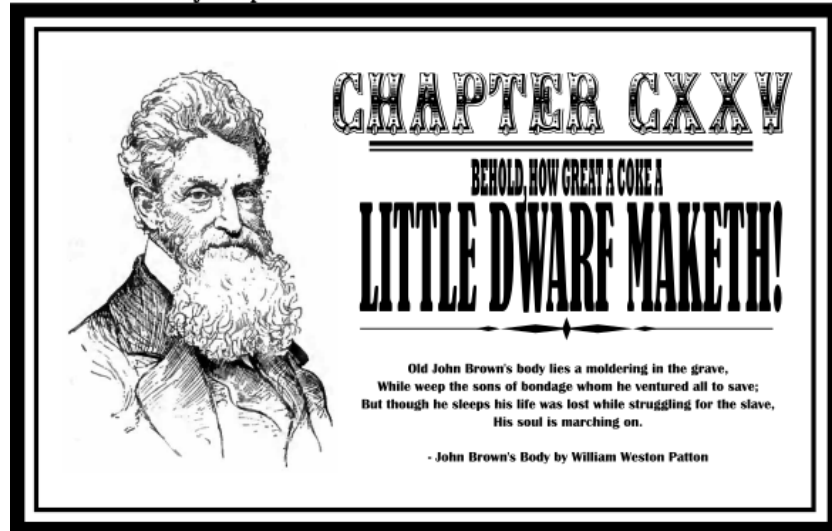
“Mmh...” It was warm, soft, and quite delicious, just a whole load of dough and sugar. “You know, I’m glad that I managed to survive all the nonsense of the maid café and experience this.” She looked out, towards the view of Libertycave that stretched before her. The city looked beautiful, in its own way.

“I’m glad to have you here with me” replied Shinasi, looking at the scenery alongside Ayomide. It was quite impressive, and beautiful, indeed, with the white rolling hills, and the houses on top, with countless chimneys smoking to show signs of life...

Perhaps there was hope in this world, despite them having so many enemies.

Chapter 131: Chapter CXXV – Behold, how great a coke a little dwarf maketh!

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 125



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

57th of Autumn 5859

Libertycave, Mount Curry

Bilal had seen many an odd thing during his life. Maid cafes, strange otherworlders, catgirls... Today, however, he was holding something stranger than all of the aforementioned: “Cooked coal?” Next to him were workers from the copperworks, who were equally fascinated by the strange rock.



“Yes, ‘cooked coal’, or coke for short.” Whitebeard was holding a grayish rock, like coal but paler, showing it off proudly to her new coworker. “You’ve been using charcoal, right? Coke is like that, except you burn coal instead of wood to make it.” Of course, even if she was a dwarf with much experience and wisdom, Whitebeard had no way to know the chemical process behind coke. They weren’t burning coal to make coke – they were burning the organic substances that came with coal (such as water) in the absence of air (similar to charcoal being wood burnt in the absence of air), leaving behind coke.

“I can get what you’re trying to do, but...” Bilal vaguely gestured at the lines upon lines of coke ovens that the dwarves had built right outside of the copperworks “All of this, just to burn coal? That ‘coke’ you’re holding, it just looks like a lump of ash.”



“Peh. That’s why I don’t like dealing with humans.” Whitebeard conspicuously tugged on her great white beard “You see this beard? I was smithing before your grand-grandparents were even a twinkle in your grand-grand-grandparents’ eyes. Have some respect for your elders, won’t you?”

“Apologies, ma’am.” Bilal could already feel his head ache from dealing with dwarves. “So, what do we do with these?”

“Patience, I was about to get to that. With these, we can make steel. Not the sad lump of pig iron that you presented to me as ‘steel’ a week ago, I mean actual, genuine, strong dwarven steel.” With the mention of steel, a gang of dwarves suddenly gathered around Whitebeard as she pointed at a structure that had been ominously standing behind them “Now, behold: a blast furnace!”



Bilal, and the workers at the copperworks, had of course not been ignorant of the odd structure that the dwarves had been constructing right in his backyard. They had been watching dwarves hard at work, cooking bricks and stacking bricks every single day without a pause. Bilal had thought that maybe this structure was some sort of housing, it seemed too large and tall to be a furnace, but it seemed that he was wrong (unless “blast furnace” was dwarven slang for “house”).

Whitebeard stepped aside to proudly show off the dwarven structure “The ‘house of pigs’ as we call it, because it produces pig iron like no other.”

“Pig iron?” Bilal shuddered “You put pigs in your iron?”

“No, no- I am impressed that you people managed to produce a bar of ‘steel’ with such little knowledge of metalmaking. Really, you did an excellent job despite your inexperience, mixing coal and iron until you got something resembling steel.” Whitebeard took a little bar of whitish gray, grainy metal that had been thrown right next to the blast furnace. “This, this is pig iron. You pour in some coke, limestone and iron from the top of that furnace, blow some air through the bottom with the bellows, and voila, you get this.” She promptly broke the little bar with no effort “As you can see, it is essentially useless for anything.”

Bilal found a bar of pig iron too, and with little effort, it snapped in his hands. “We had such brittle metal come out when we tried to make steel too. I assume it has some sort of use if you built such a giant furnace to make it.”

“Yes, we dwarves would never make something useless. Thankfully your copperworks has the other half of what we need to make steel: bloomeries and crucibles. The iron we produce there is what we’d call ‘wrought iron’, since you have to work to beat the iron out of the slag that comes out of the bloomery. Most human smiths stop here and work wrought iron into tools, weapons, whatever else they need.”

“We haven’t had much iron come around these parts, what little we have here we’ve made into smithing tools to help with the copperworks.” Bilal himself had a pair of iron hammers that he was quite proud of.

“Wrought iron is good enough for most things, I have to admit. However, if you want something that’ll put a clean cut through your enemies, or prevent your enemies from putting a clean cut on you, you’ll want some good dwarven steel.” Whitebeard had been slowly marching over to a clay crucible that had been dragged outside by the dwarves. “Now, guess what happens when we mix wrought iron and pig iron in a crucible?”

“Uhm, since pig iron seems brittle, we’d get something even worse?” replied Bilal.

“Wrong. You get steel, stronger than wrought iron.” Whitebeard’s hand slid towards the steel dagger sheathed on her waist, a fine example of the metal. “Don’t ask me how this works, the finest dwarven minds have racked their brains for centuries on how adding a weaker metal results in a stronger metal. We have yet to figure it out.”

Unfortunately for the finest dwarven minds, they’d have to crack modern chemistry (far from possible with pre-modern technology) to figure out the fact that steel is an alloy of carbon and iron. The dwarven method was simple if one was to look from that modern angle: Wrought iron doesn’t contain enough carbon, pig iron contains too much carbon, mixing both results in an iron alloy that contains just the right amount of carbon (a.k.a. steel) which makes it stronger and more resistant than wrought iron. Pig iron has a lower melting point (due to it having a weaker structure), while wrought iron is normally impossible to melt in a charcoal or coal-powered crucible. However, coke burns hotter than either, meaning that it is possible to mix both alloys to create steel easily without going through the many troubles that smiths on *Gemeinplatz* and Earth had to go through to get the alloys to mix together. The dwarven method was quite ingenious – especially the substitution of coke for charcoal, which’d take until the 18th century on Earth to become widespread.

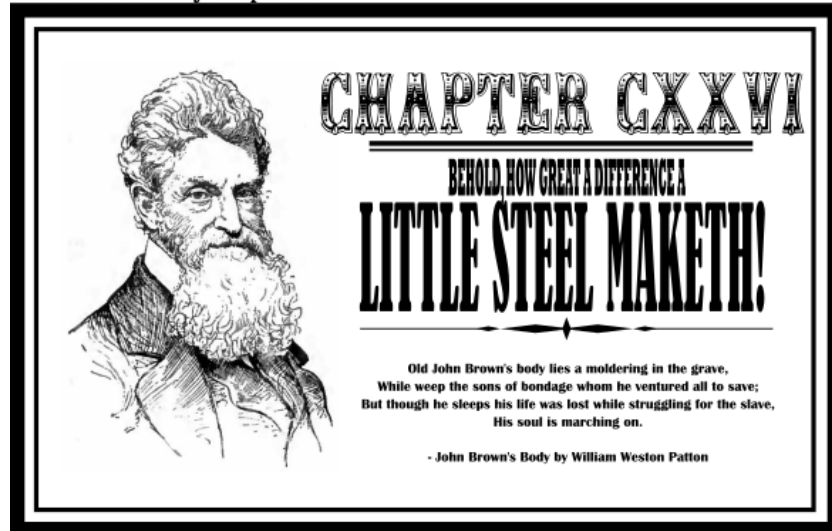
“I guess it’s like mixing tin and copper to make bronze” concluded Bilal after pausing to think “Metals sure are mysterious.”

Whitebeard smiled at her new coworker “That’s why I love them. Metallurgy isn’t seen as magic, but I think it should be.” She cleared her throat, it was sore after all that talk, and looked at all the copperworkers around her “That was more than enough talk, I think. I can see that you are all eager to upgrade from copperwork to steelwork, and that won’t happen just by listening to me talk. I have a bunch of dwarves here ready to take on apprentices. Let us get to work!”

With that the copperworks, or soon to be the former copperworks, gained liveliness as the copperworkers mingled with the dwarves to find themselves a suitable role in the steelmaking process. Liberty would be built on strong foundations – not brittle copper, but sturdy steel.

Chapter 132: Chapter CXXVI – Behold, how great a difference a little steel maketh!

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 126



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

88th of Autumn 5859 Libertycave, Mount Curry

Winter was coming, as evidenced by yet another flurry of snow coming down to Libertycave. The trees had shed all their leaves and no brown was left save for Brown. Now it was all white: the buildings, the trees, even the sky covered in clouds overwatching the small world of men scurrying to get their business done, and the few lazy ones who were not worrying about business at that moment.

“Ayomide, you’re supposed to roll it, *gently*.” Shinasi, famous idler and twiddler of thumbs, was rolling a snowball in service for greater snow-related plans.

“Give me a break, this is the first time I get to play in snow! I’m not an expert ball roller like you.” Ayomide rubbed her hands together, blowing some hot hair into them. “This snow stuff looks all soft and fluffy like cotton, I thought it’d be warmer.”

“I mean, it’s like frozen water that descends from the heavens. That doesn’t sound warm to me.” Shinasi groaned, struggling to push the ever-largening ball of snow.

Ayomide looked up to said heavens. It really looked like there was snow above them too. “Are clouds just flying snow then?”

All Shinasi could do in reply was pause, straighten himself, and give a shrug before promptly attempting to return back to his job of idling. He was rudely interrupted by a man passing by and hailing him.

“Oh, are you two making a snowman?” Watanabe, on his morning walk before getting to work as Rabanowicz’s assistant, approached the pair. He looked comedic in his winterwear, his modern suit clashing with the fur he had covered himself with.

“You know about snowmen, Mr. Watanabe?” asked Shinasi.

“Of course, you don’t pass by winter without making at least one. I am surprised that snowmen are a thing here too.” Not like Watanabe recently had chance to make much in the big city as a white-collar worker, but now he found himself wanting to join in the idling. “Let me lend a hand.”

The trio spent the next few minutes rolling up snow until they each had a big ball of snow. The result was a snowman with three segments, a lanky fellow that was about a meter in length.

“Hmm...” Shinasi planted his hands on the head of the snowman.

“What are you doing, Shinasi?” Ayomide wondered if he had somehow gotten drunk off-screen.

“One sec, and ta-da! It’s a snowcatgirl!” Shinasi stepped aside to proudly present his masterpiece: a snowman with two cat ears on top.

“Sheesh, do I look that ugly to you?” Ayomide added with a chuckle.

The snowman was suddenly assaulted viciously, as in it was stabbed six times with sticks by Watanabe right on its face. “There. Whiskers! Cats have whiskers, no?”



Ayomide patted her own face to check. “No, cats don’t have whiskers Watanabe. I’ve only seen whiskers on, like, rats.”

“Of course, you’re a cat... girl...” Watanabe’s voice trailed off. He searched his memories, searching for the thing that the Internet was invented to contain. But no, he had not seen any of them. Not one. “Now that I think about it, I haven’t seen any cats. Like, those furry little animals? They go *meow* and stuff.”

“Uhm... Are you calling me a furry animal? Because I’ll let you know that I am neither furry or an animal.”

“And I’ve never heard Ayomide go ‘knee-yaw’.”

“Oh...” Watanabe silently lamented for the late feline race of Gemeinplatz. “Never mind. It’s just an earthling matter. I got confused there for a sec.”

“Yeah, imagine if I was a furry little animal. That’d be horrifying. *Meow*.” The meow at the end was the oddest meow that Watanabe had heard, probably because it had come from someone who had never heard a cat meow. “‘*Meow*.’ What sort of sound even is that.”

“I don’t have much time to ponder on that, I’ve got to go. Gotta do my job as a living human computer for the doctor, and Rabanowicz is not happy when I’m late.” Watanabe bowed a farewell and continued his merry way, cats occupying his mind while on the way. The heavy snow made walking annoying. His boots sunk first into snow, then into mud, then he had to exert great effort to pull them out in every step. Thankfully much of Libertycave had acquired roads, but Rabanowicz’s lab was a bit of a way off from the city center. Not that it was much of a “lab”, it was an abandoned shepherd’s shack that she had discovered while doing miscellaneous research around Mount Curry.

Watanabe stopped and knocked on the door, which he then was promptly greeted by the countenance of Rabanowicz. “Good morning. You are late, Mister ‘Hero’.”

“It was... the snow. I had a hard time finding my way around with the snowstorm outside.” No need to tell her that he had been making snowmen.

“You better get used to it. Come in, I have the tea ready, it should still be hot.” Rabanowicz entered the room, and Watanabe followed by closing the door behind him. Thankfully there was a stove inside, convenient both for heating and teamaking. Despite the dismal condition of the abandoned shack, it still managed to feel quite cozy to stay in.

Watanabe, squeezing by the prototype printing press that was taking up half the space inside the shack, poured himself a cup and dragged a seat right by the stove. “So, what are our plans for today?”

Rabanowicz meanwhile had sat at her desk, quite the wide one that had a mess of papers and books on it. “Not much, in all honesty. We’re still waiting for the steel mechanism of the press to be forged in the copperworks. Hopefully they’ll manage to endure this time, unlike the copper.” She was scribbling on some paper while talking, not raising her head up.

“I’ve had enough of fine-tuning gears for a lifetime...” added Watanabe, with a sip to drown the bad memories away. Copper just wasn’t good enough for something like a press, or much of any machinery really.

“Luckily for you, our next project is a little bit simpler. Here.” Rabanowicz held up the paper she had been scribbling.

“That’s...” *something that’s like a long stick, with a metal tube on top*, “...a *shoujuu*? Uhh... Hand cannon! Right, that’s what those are called here.” The oddest thing about being an otherworlder in Gemeinplatz was definitely the part where one instantly learned a whole language. Blanking out while trying to remember a concept or word that didn’t exist in the language had proved to be a common occurrence for Watanabe.

“Yes, though the... the...” Rabanowicz had trouble finding the word ‘arquebus’ and ‘matchlock’
“...the hand canon. Hand canon. Ahem, it’s a more improved version of the hand canon.”

“I can see that. It looks close to the... the... Oh, screw this, it looks close to the thingies of my world. The fire shooting armaments. Firearms!” Watanabe breathed a sigh of relief after finally finding the word he was looking for.

“Firearm, yes. It’s... you know the firearms that are fired with matches. Matchlocks, the hand canons are operated in the same way. A matchlock. This one has a flint... A flint-lock. I never had these back home. Monsieur Brown and I talked a bit about firearms from his world, and I think I’ve managed to figure out how one of these would practically work.”



“I...” Watanabe himself had no idea about firearms, so he just calmly nodded along.

“I see that you have no idea, monsieur. With this, we’d have better firearms than the rest of Gemeinplatz, or more importantly, we’d have firearms. I already know that Brown knows a woman, Ayda of Casamonu, who has provided the League with gunpowder before.”

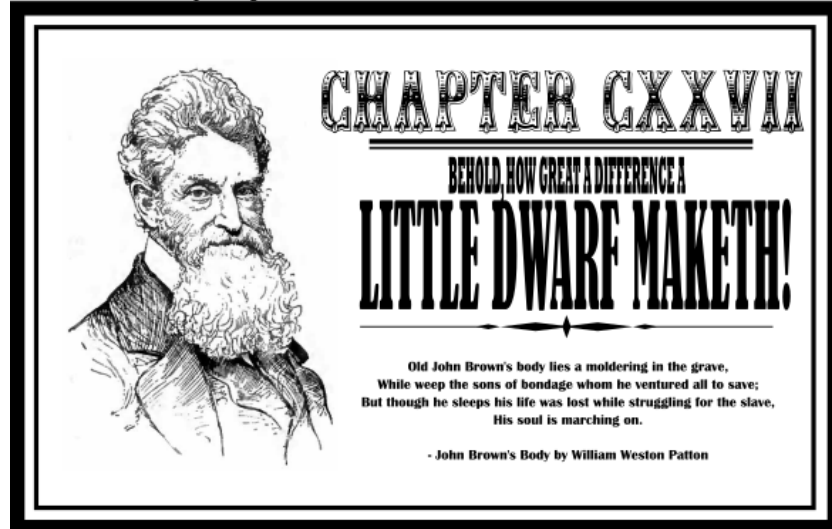
Watanabe nodded, more genuinely this time “It does sound nice, to give the guys down in Casamonu a big scare when we come down the mountain with firearms.”

“Not only that, but... well, I have something that I think is even more devastating than the firearms themselves. Something that the captain made as a passing comment, but I think it’ll be quite the revolutionary little thing.” Before she explained anything further however, she tapped on the table with her finger “Well, that is a matter for when we have the firearms ready. For now, I need your help on calculating how wide and long we should make this thing.”

“Alright, doctor.” Watanabe gulped the last of his now lukewarm tea down and made his way to the table. For him, it was just another day of mundane number crunching.

Chapter 133: Chapter CXXVII – Behold, how great a difference a little dwarf maketh!

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 127



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

1st of Winter 5859 Copperworks, Libertycave

Winter, the first. Gemeinplatz had seen the return of General Winter at last. From the ever-snowy peaks of Mount Curry to the whitening plains down below, all had become white. To many it was a curse of sorts, where they couldn't conduct their trade or plant their crops. To those in Libertycave it was a blessing; no sane person would conduct a military campaign in winter. It was time to rest, build up, and then reap what they sowed when spring came.

"Here it is: the place where steel is sown." Whitebeard pushed open the door of the former copperworks, to show it off to her guests. A terrible heat, so hot that it made one forget that it was winter outside, blasted out the door as soon as it opened.

"That's quite hot. Have you stolen a piece of the sun and put it here?" commented Ayomide while immediately removing her bear pelt coat.

Brown too joined in the decoating. "Young lady, I don't think we have the technology to do that. If we did, I'd be sending a piece of the sun towards the Empire posthaste."

"Creating a second sun is... a bit outside of our capabilities unfortunately. Come, see what we can do now instead of daydreaming." Whitebeard led them inside and closed the door behind them.

Inside, the copperworks had changed a lot. The small, mud-and-brick furnaces had been recycled into grandiose blast furnaces which had a dozen men, dwarf and human, working on them each. A bunch of otherwise unnoticeable rocks, coke, iron, and limestone, were dropped from the top of these furnaces only to come out the bottom as molten hot metal that shined so bright that one couldn't look at it directly without hurting one's eyes. Then to the crucibles they went, to be mixed with wrought iron to make steel.

From there, a small trickle of steel flowed down to a mold, where Whitebeard proudly declared to her guests “Behold, a spear!” There was a few more spear molds, which the steelworkers swapped to make sure they were all filled. Two dozen spears more came out of that one crucible, which Whitebeard watched with great pride and Ayomide watched with amazement.

Brown wasn’t too amazed, he was a man of the Industrial Revolution after all, but he was still in awe that these dwarves had figured out metallurgy that was way more advanced than the rest of Gemeinplatz. “Will these spears be ready for use once they’re cooled down?”

“Not immediately no. They’ll still need sharpen them. Plus, we still need to craft wooden shafts for all of them, not to mention that we’re quickly burning the iron and coal we received from Miss Tubman... Other than that, yes, things are progressing without problem.” Whitebeard showed them a crate that had been left in a corner, in which a pile of spearheads had already been stacked.

“Lovely, aren’t they?”

Brown picked up one of the heads. He played around with it, twirling it in his hand, until he was satisfied. “I wouldn’t call any tool of war ‘lovely’, but I appreciate the craftsmanship.”

“I *will* call it lovely. This is quite the lovely thing” replied Ayomide, inspecting the spearhead.

“I wouldn’t call it lovely either. There’s a reason why us dwarves haven’t sold our methods to the outside world. We planned on assisting the Republic, to the best of our capability, and then retreating back to our mountain once a state of relative peace was back in Gemeinplatz...”

Whitebeard let out a sour chuckle “What can I say, the Imperials weren’t thinking straight when they antagonized us.”

Brown tossed the spearhead back into the crate. It landed among its many peers, making a metallic clinking sound as it settled. “I’m glad that the dwarves saw reason and decided to venture out of the mountain Miss Whitebeard. I don’t think it’d have been polite if they stayed over there while we were massacred.”

“It has been dwarven tradition to stay out of human business since time immemorial. I don’t think you’d have dwarves to help you if my ancestors had been killed off after a rash decision. Right now, we’re in an emergency. After that, we hope to return to our mountain and be in peace.”

“I hope not. Mingling with the dwarves have been quite enrichening for both sides, I feel. I hope that you will return safely to your home, and keep connected with the outside world.” Brown would’ve monologued a bit more on how pacifism was basically an endorsement of the status quo, slavery, but he could already feel that he was losing the attention of the dwarf in front of him. “But, that is beyond our concern right now. We must be on our way to other business.”

2nd of Winter 5859

New Inkwell Printworks, Libertycave

Life has a way of surprising one with its many strange twists and turns. For many in Gemeinplatz such a twist had come with the slave rebellion and the coup of Chancellor Spear.

One such straggler who had found herself picked up and carried away in the storm of Gemeinplatz was Shakira, former adventurer, who now found her skill in handling massive objects be useful in

another way. “Phew... These presses are quite stubborn.”

“They have to be, otherwise the print won’t look good if we don’t press on the paper hard enough.” Azra, and her re-established printing company, had employed a few people from Libertycave to make up for those loyal to her father who had stayed in Casamonu. After almost a season of training, these employees were finally picking up the slack. “Just don’t break them. We can’t replace any of these presses yet.”

The printworks itself was a modest building, a brick house that had been filled with the printing presses hauled over from Casamonu. Most of the equipment from the old printworks was still left outside, and even then, the inside of the building was still left cramped. One day the printworks would be as big as the copperworks... for now Azra had to carefully scoot around the printing presses and the people around them.

CRACK! “...boss, I think I just broke something.” It was Shakira, who had pressed the press a bit too hard and depressed the flat plate that held the paper, which had also broken a few nails and split a gear in half.

“How did you manage to do *that*?!” Azra had to carefully scoot back around to where Shakira was working. “That’s *steel*. Manufactured in the Imperial capital. The finest there is, this gear was forged by the most skilled of Gemeinplatz and... you broke it...”

“Sorry boss.” Shakira cheekily flexed her arms “These are used to bashing monsters as hard as they can, not fine control.”

“You... I’d fire you if not for...” Azra calmed down with a long, deep sigh. “Well, that’s one press gone. Where do we get another one-”

Just then, Azra heard a voice that she had come to know very well. “Hello! It is I, Watanabe Haru-”

“Yes, we get it.” Rabanowicz entered the printworks, Watanabe right behind her. “Apologies for the delay, we needed to wait for the dwarves to... Did we arrive at the wrong time?”

“No, the right time actually! Maybe too right.” Azra scooted around, again, to the door. “So, the new press? It’s ready?”

“It was ready yesterday, but it took us a day to drag it to your front door. Here,” Rabanowicz led Azra outside, to where the wood and steel behemoth stood. It was basically a copy of the Gemeinplatzian design, enhanced with dwarven steel which might withstand even Shakira.

“Goodness... That’s quite the machine!” Azra began dancing around the machine, leaning down occasionally to inspect it. “Impressive, to have dissected our presses so quickly.”

“It’s a pretty regular printing press design. I’m surprised nobody in your realm ever managed to make a copy of these presses instead of relying on the capital... along with all the things in this realm that nobody seems to have bothered to fix.”

“We’re here to fix things, aren’t we?” replied Azra “The pen is mightier than the sword, and the press is mightier than both.”

“Right on.” The two pre-modern nerds, Azra and Rabanowicz, gave each other an approving nod. “I’ve already written up this week’s ‘new’s paper’ as Watanabe calls it. You should receive the

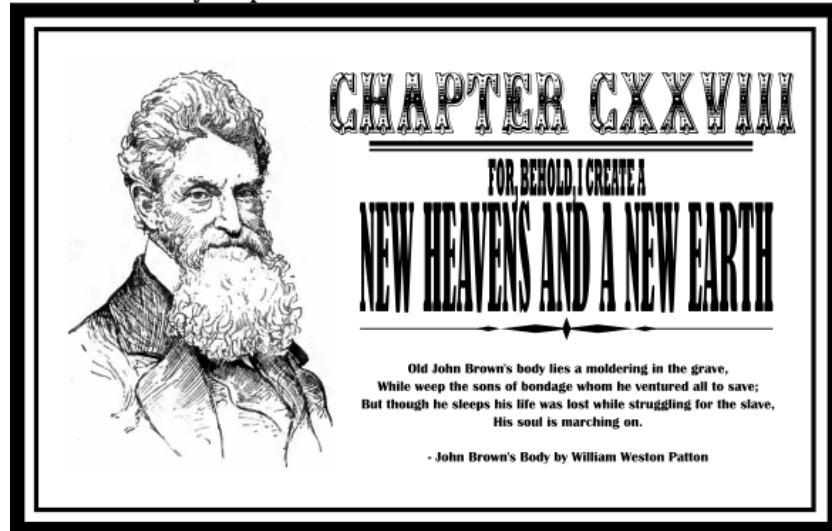
manuscript tomorrow after I've done some spellchecking.”

“We should have them posted all around Libertycave by the next day then, if you deliver it early enough.”

Perhaps, with steel and the press, the Republic was going towards modernity faster than thought...

Chapter 134: Chapter CXXVIII – For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 128



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

11th of Winter 5859 In front of the Copperworks, Libertycave

“Okay, old man, what odd contraption do you have today?” A simple question, asked by an irritated maid café maid turned revolutionary catgirl wizard who was bothered by the fact that she had to walk out in the cold and wake up early today. She was standing in the middle of an empty field that had been cleared right outside of the copperworks, wondering what was so important there. There was a stick resting on a table, the “odd contraption”, which looked out of place in the otherwise empty space.

“Young lady, you are true that this is a contraption, but I assure you that this is not an odd one. Behold!” Brown handed the stick to Ayomide “A staff!”

“A...” Ayomide held the stick up. She swung it around, it was a normal stick, she flipped it around, it was still an ordinary stick, she stuck it into the ground, it kept being an unnoticeable stick “... stick. Old man, I thought we had advanced from needing to use these.”

“No, no, pay attention young lady.” Brown unstuck the stick from the ground. The part of the stick with a metal end, that had a concave hole carved into it, had been obscured by the snow. “Hand me the green crystal that you have, if you could.”

“Alright?” Ayomide took the magic green crystal out of her pocket. She carried it around – it proved occasionally useful both as a flashlight and a flashbang.

“Now...” Before accepting the crystal, Brown took an oddly-shaped knife out of his coat. The knife had no handle, though it had a metal ring welded to its bottom. He stuck this metal ring onto the flat metal part of the staff, twisted it around, and it fit like a glove. “First, the bayonet.” Then he took the crystal from Ayomide, and it too managed to fit on the concave hole that had been

constructed specifically for it. He handed the newly magically-capable staff back to Ayomide “This was a little gift from the folks over at the copperworks. A staff, bayonet and all!”

“Oh, I’ll have to give my thanks to them.” Ayomide took the rod back, rested it on the ground, and smiled. Holding a crystal barehanded was a bit of a bother, as it had a tendency to slip out of her hand. She flicked her cape, rested one hand on her hip and held out the staff with an even bigger, and dumber, grin on her face.

“Young lady, what are you doing?” asked Brown, upon observing Ayomide trying to look cool.

“Fashion, old man. I am doing fashion. You wouldn’t understand it.” Ayomide straightened her cape and returned to acting normal “So, is there any other reason why I have been called to this field?”

“Yes, there was. The reason just hasn’t arrived yet. They’re a bit late…” Brown had been tapping his boots on the ground impatiently since Ayomide’s arrival. “Or we’re too early. Either way, let us wait.”

It took half an hour before another soul appeared before their eyes. It was Rabanowicz, accompanied by Watanabe who was carrying a weapon. Ayomide didn’t really know what it was, but she found it to look similar to John Brown’s otherworldly M1. “Excuse us, the people over at the printworks needed some help with their printing press.” Watanabe greeted Brown with a polite bow, almost dropping the weapon he was carrying.

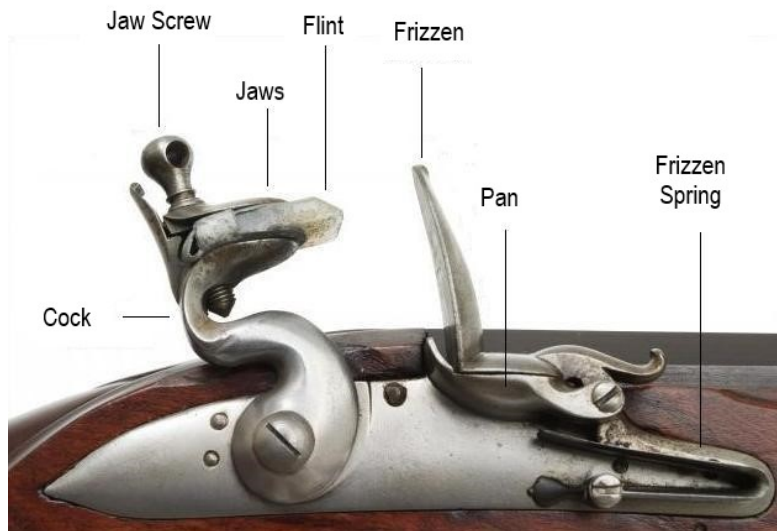
“Is that… a replica of the rapid hand canon that the captain has?” Ayomide was amazed. Just being able to produce a few of these would be devastating!

“No Madame Ayomide, it is a simpler firearm. A *musket*. Believe me, I disassembled and looked through the M1 – it operates with very intricately-cut parts that’d take perhaps years for a craftsman to make, with a self-reloading mechanism that I couldn’t figure it out. I couldn’t even figure out those tiny little metal bullets: they contain a substance, an explosive which is not gunpowder, that I nor anyone else have any idea to make.” Rabanowicz sounded infatuated with the semi-automatic rifle, and she could go on about what little she had figured out for hours. However, there was other business for her to do. “Anyways, this musket is closer to the hand canons of this realm than the M1 of Brown’s realm. A simple thing, that you should be able to figure out.”

“So simple in fact, that we have a manual for it, illustrated by yours truly.” Watanabe handed a freshly-printed arms manual, a very thin one, to Ayomide. “That was our plan for today: to see whether this musket is suitable for mass use.”

“Hmm…” Ayomide quickly skimmed over the manual. There were a few illustrations in it, showing off how to operate the musket. She found the soldiers in the illustrations to be odd: they had really big eyes, she’d call it cartoonish if cartoons were a thing in Gemeinplatz, and odd proportions with very soft-looking cheeks. “Do we need this? We can train the men ourselves without the need for reading.”

“Or, young lady, consider that we could save time on training by giving such manuals to the men. We do need to act swiftly and efficiently if we want to get out of this mountain intact.” Brown took a few steps back to give Ayomide space. “Now, let’s see if you can figure this out.” He also handed her a flask of gunpowder and a few small balls made out of lead.



“I sure can.” Ayomide held the musket in one hand and the manual on the other. “First...” Ayomide rotated the cock halfway, which was essentially the safety for these flintlock weapons. Then she turned the gun around muzzle-up, poured a bit of the gunpowder down the muzzle, and then put a lead ball on it. She had to ram down the lead ball with a ramrod that was conveniently stored under the barrel of the flintlock. After few clicks, and clanks, and the lead ball was in. Finally, she had to turn the gun around again, to let it stay horizontally, and pour a bit of gunpowder into the flash pan. Ayomide turned around towards the onlookers “I think that’s ready to-”

Brown screamed “Young lady, don’t point a loaded gun towards anyone you don’t intend to shoot!”

“Ah, right, shouldn’t do that.” Ayomide pointed the gun instead towards an empty wall belonging to the copperworks. “Am I okay to fire?” She turned the cock further, until it made a click, upon seeing Brown nod. The next part was familiar to the few crossbows she had seen: push the trigger and-

BOOM!

Ayomide fell on to the ground from the unexpected recoil. “Crap, my arms...” There was a great cloud of smoke in front of her, and the wall of the copperworks had a new hole in it.

“Are you fine, young lady?” Brown held Ayomide’s hand and helped her get up “You’ll have to get used to it, and mind your manners while using them. These muskets kick back like a mad donkey.”

“They sound as loud as one too” added Ayomide, her ears ringing. “Ow.”

“Unfortunately, we can’t make gunpowder explode quietly. Unless...” Brown took a look at Ayomide and her staff. “...we don’t use gunpowder. Like the air canon, but smaller... an air gun, those were a thing. I’ve seen a few used for hunting back in the United States.”

Rabanowicz intervened “We don’t need anything special for Ayomide. A musket sans firing mechanism would work for her. Maybe with an extra chamber in the breech to hold a few bullets.”

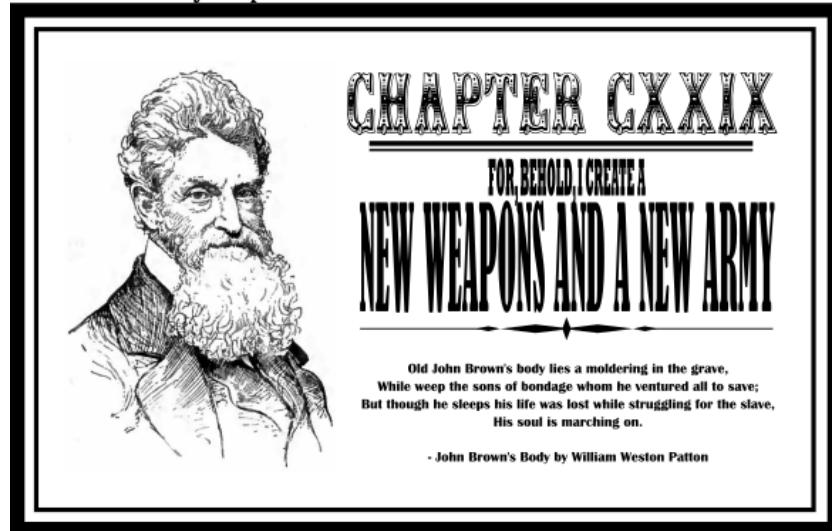
“That’d be quite nice. Something rapid firing like the captain’s... to blow up slavers more efficiently.” Ayomide raised the musket and jolted it up several times as if she was firing it rapidly. “Like that.”

“That may be a bit more difficult, but I’ll try to figure something out. For now however, I need to assist the people over at the copperworks to make sure that they’re producing these muskets properly.”

With that, the four people in the flat field dispersed to do their own thing. Quietly, and efficiently, the Republic had entered the age of gunpowder warfare.

Chapter 135: Chapter CXXIX – For, behold, I create new weapon and a new army.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 129



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

52nd of Winter 5859 Libertycave, State of Casamonu

Gemeinplatz was quite deep into winter by the 52nd. Snow piled higher and higher every day. It was a blessing for the denizens of Libertycave; nobody would dare attack up a mountain in such weather. It was equally a curse; nobody wanted to trek down the mountain either.

Still, the likes of Harriet Tubman still had to take the treacherous journey up and down to complete their mission. It was quite hard pushing up carts full of iron and coal up a snowy mountain, though the stretch of road that had been built up to Libertycave. The road that Tubman traversed represented a dream, one which had been abruptly crushed by the arrival of the army from Karabush. “Only if we had finished this road,” she thought out loud “then all this travel would take only a day or two at most.”

Tubman’s companion, Kyauta, chimed in “Our folk will have plenty of time to do that once winter is over.”

“May God help us drive out those rascals down below.” Tubman gazed at the sky, looking for Providence in the sea of clouds above.

“Amen.” Kyauta joined in the skygazing, not finding much cheer in the snow-filled sky. It was quite dark outside, even in the morning, as the clouds had been blocking out the sun for weeks. Most of the people in Libertycave, being used to the warmer climates of Gemeinplatz’s lowlands or from far away lands, felt quite sleepy, even melancholic, in this dark, freezing weather. Though, perhaps, it was their moods feeling blue after having been stuck on a mountain for months now. “May God lead us out of this mountain. I am sick of this place.”

“Now, now. Be grateful of the safe haven that the Lord has granted us-”

BOOM!

A gunshot. Tubman and Kyauta suddenly threw themselves down on the snow for safety. Then came a dozen or so gunshots, so many that they both lost count, and a great smoke rose up from behind a hill. The two women waited silently, not even daring to take a breath, while they thought of what to do. Had the madmen, the Imperials, found out their smuggling route up the mountain and set up an ambush?

A familiar voice. “Reload!” It was Ayomide, shouting from behind the hill. She certainly didn’t sound ambushed from how calm he was. Tubman and Kyauta looked at each other in shock, before they both nodded. They got up and shouted back “Ayomide?”

“General?” Soon, Ayomide’s ears (and then the rest of her head) appeared looking over them at the hill. “What’s gotten you so worried?”

“Gunshots, girl. The gunshots.” replied Tubman.

Ayomide immediately got what Tubman’s concern was “Oh, those are coming from our men. Just a bit of military drill, that Brown asked us to do outside of the town due to how loud it is. Would you like to rest your legs a bit? We have a few seats here.”

“We’ll have to take you up on that.” Tubman and Kyauta made their way up the hill, an arduous affair after all that walking, and found that there was a line of the Republic’s finest infantry standing ready on top of the hill. They were dressed lighter than their speared comrades, no helmet or any other armor. Instead, they had fur hats and snazzy gambesons that were colored a bright light blue for easy identification in the musket smoke. Yes, muskets – they had muskets shouldered with their muzzles (tipped with a bayonet) pointing up towards the sky. “I feel like I just stepped forward in time.”

“Brown says that we did.” Ayomide too had a snazzy new outfit: a bright blue coat and pants combo that were familiar to Tubman. “These things, muskets, they’re amazing. Very fun to shoot.” It seemed that a love for big booms was a thing that transcended culture and dimension.

“You’ve loved it if you saw one of them *gatling guns*. They shoot like a *typewriter* – taka-taka-rata-thuck. Like that.” Kyauta and Ayomide looked at Tubman strangely after her expert gatling gun impression. “I don’t like them though. They’re horrifying, like a *factory* only made to dispense death.”

Ayomide was stunned “...I honestly don’t know what a *gahtuhlin*, *tahuypraytar* or *faktori* is.”

“Me neither” added Kyauta.

“Those are not important for now.” Tubman was still as confused as all the other otherworlders on how she had suddenly received knowledge of the local knowledge. It was a miracle of course, one granted by Providence, so she wouldn’t question it that much. “Let us sit and watch how your men do.” She took her seat among the few seats that had been dragged out there, and Ayomide separated to give command to her men.

The men were lined up in two ranks, the front rank crouching and the back rank standing. Ayomide cleared her throat, and shouted, “Prime and load!” The men uncapped their flasks of gunpowder to pour a bit of gunpowder on a pan in the firing mechanism. Then they dropped the butts of their muskets to the ground, poured gunpowder down the barrel, rammed a lead ball in, and stopped.

Normally Ayomide would have given instructions in every step of the drill, telling them to drop their muskets (bout) or draw their ramrods (draw ramrods) etc., but the men had moved on to training to carry out these movements by instinct as they'd have to do in actual battle.

"Make ready!" The men cocked their muskets and raised them facing up again.

"Present!" The muskets were lowered, to be in a horizontal position facing forward, ready to fire.

Finally, the long awaited "Fire!", and for a brief few seconds nothing else but the rhythmic shot of muskets could be heard. The line was covered in a cloud of smoke, as if the men had committed to a disappearing act. It took a good minute before the men were visible again as the smoke blew off.

"I'm thankful that I won't be the poor sod who'll be at the business end of this volley" commented Ayomide.

"I'm thankful as well, to the Lord for not placing us at the business end" added Tubman. Not that she was unfamiliar with being on the end of a volley; the Civil War had presented General Tubman with plenty of experience in many different regards. "I'll tell you: it is not pleasant to be on the other end of the volley, with bullets whizzing by in all directions."

"I'm not going to worry about giving Imperials an unpleasant time. Let them be our guest on the battlefield!" replied Ayomide with a smile.

"I appreciate the enthusiasm of youth." Tubman stretched for a bit, and then got up. "We'll have to get going. These carts of ore won't push themselves."

"Good luck, General Tubman." Ayomide sent Tubman off with a salute, and then shouted once more: "Prime and load!"

Chapter 136: Interlude – From whence we came.

Watanabe held the musket in his hands. “This feels wrong.” It was loaded, he had loaded it, and if he had pointed it at someone and pulled the trigger...

Rabanowicz tapped Watanabe’s shoulder. “Is there something wrong with the musket, monsieur?”

“No, no. I think it’s perfectly fine.” There was nobody around in the empty field, except for him, her, and a few people training with this new weapon. Watanabe took a deep breath. His entire body was shaking. “It’s... well, what I can say, I have never handled a firearm before.”

“Really? I’m sure I’ve heard you talk about firearms from your realm. You were boasting about guns going ‘ra-ta-ta-ta’ and ‘boom-kapow’.” Rabanowicz imitated the shaking motion that Watanabe had done to show how a machine gun would fire, which caused him great embarrassment.

“I’ve only seen them in movies – in fiction. I never saw a gun, or a sword, or anything else in front of me let alone handle one.” Watanabe rested the butt of his musket on the ground, making sure to keep the muzzle as far away from his general direction as possible.

“That’s... how sheltered were you? A man should carry a sword at least, to protect himself. I myself always carry my dagger and pistol with me.” Rabanowicz patted the pockets of her gambeson.

“Back where I was, carrying a pistol around like that would’ve gotten you arrested.” Watanabe instinctively took a few steps back from the armed-and-dangerous woman. “The otherworld is scary...”

“Come now. Be a man and shoot that musket!” Rabanowicz took out her wheellock pistol, gave it a crank, and shot it at a nearby target. “See? I am more man than you!”

“I surrender my manhood if it means that I don’t have to shoot this thing-” Watanabe cowered as Rabanowicz rushed towards him.

“Just shoot the thing!” Rabanowicz pushed the musket back into Watanabe’s hands. She was way too strong for a woman who spent most of her time sitting at a desk, or was it that Watanabe was way too weak?

“Alright, alright- let me go already!” Watanabe managed to regain his freedom from the doctor. “Okay. Here it goes. One, two-”

BOOM!

Watanabe fell to the ground, not from the recoil, but because he felt dizzy after pulling the trigger. “Oh... Oh, I can see the light...” He only stood back up thanks to the freezing snow underneath him giving him a jolt.

“See, that wasn’t so hard, was it? For a noble, pampered man like you to participate in warfare for once.” Rabanowicz gave her assistant a reassuring pat on the back and a rare smile.

“I’m neither noble and pampered, I’m afraid. I just come from more peaceful times.” It was amusing to Watanabe that he had suddenly become this out-of-touch nobleman. Perhaps a 21st century white collar job did afford living that could be compared to the noblemen of old... though it certainly did not feel like it when he was back home.

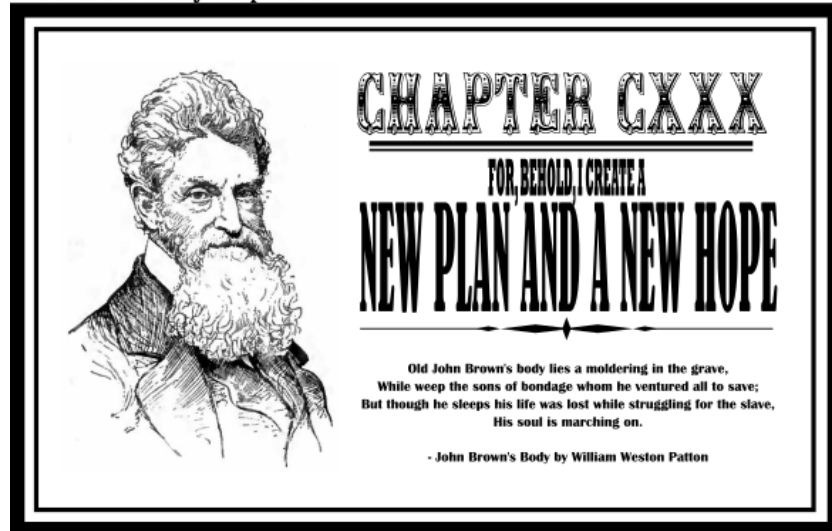
“Lucky you, monsieur.” Rabanowicz handed Watanabe another bunch of lead balls. “Now, stop worrying and start shooting.”

Apologies for the short chapter:

I went to a protest, walked a couple kilometers, stood outside in the cold for a few hours, and had a lovely meeting with the police. My body has ached all over this week, and I also caught a cold. I've been recovering from that the whole week so that I can join another one this Sunday (When you see this chapter publically, it'll have been at least two months since this has been originally written due to [REDACTED] preview chapters, so that Sunday will have passed a long while back). I didn't want to leave my readers completely Brownless, so I gathered all my strength to write up at least something. Hopefully you enjoy this interlude about our favorite idiot Watanabe, short as it may be.

Chapter 137: Chapter CXXX – For, behold, I create a new plan and a new hope.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 130



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

80th of Winter 5859 Libertycave, State of Casamonu

Time had passed quite quickly in Libertycave, as if a chronomancers had done their work and skipped weeks in an instant. Sitting comfortably on her second-floor room, complete with her lovely window, Ayomide realized why time had passed by so quickly: the sky had been completely covered with clouds for the last few weeks. She had forgotten the passage of time was a thing when the day was about as dark as the night. All the days of training, training, and more training had made them blend all together, until... “Oh, the snow stopped.”

“Huh?” Shinasi, who had been sitting right next to her, turned his gaze from his companion to the window “So it has.”

“What day are we on?” asked Ayomide. This was perhaps the first time in her life that she had to care about what day she was on. All days had been workdays for her, back in the maid café and now with the League, except for “Sunday” (every 7 days) when Brown was lenient.

Shinasi, being a former adventurer and current holder of bar tabs that he had escaped from paying thanks to the fall of Casamonu, knew time a bit more well “Uh... Tenthday, I believe. We should be on the eightieth of this season.”

“Eightieth of Winter... Ain’t it ten days until the new year then? You know, the day where all the patrons came to the café and bought a lot of stuff. I guess that’s why they came over at that date.” Thinking about it, this would be Ayomide’s first new year as a free woman.

“Yeah, because people celebrate the coming of spring. It’s when you get to breathe a sigh of relief and get to work sowing. I’d go back to my folk in Yellowclover to celebrate and then help them with work if I could.” He felt himself shiver when remembering the warmer weather down below.

Here, in Mount Curry, it was always a bit chilly. “Hopefully we’ll get down the mountain in time for sowing season.”

“It won’t be long with the snow stopping already, thankfully. The mountain ranges start to get boring once you see them every day.” Saying that however, Ayomide had bigger concerns than the scenery outside of her window. “I’m sure the old man is already starting to make preparations to leave Libertycave.”

“It’s like he has a nail stuck in his chair with how restless the captain is. Still, the nail in his bum has saved us. I can’t complain too much.” Shinasi, who acted like he had glue stuck between him and chairs, stretched and yawned for a bit before getting up. “Milady Orange, shall we set forth?” he said while extending a hand forward towards Ayomide.

“...saying ‘milady’ does not suit you with that unkempt face of yours.” With a smile, Ayomide took his hand and got up. “O’ brave knight, let us go on our business to defeat the evil dragon who dwell down in the plains.”

“Yeah, that tone suits you way more than mine does. I wonder if you’re the lost daughter of some noble of Ginye? A princess? Princess Orange?” Shinasi patted some dust off of the blue gambeson of the so-called princess.

“Oh, a peasant who can distinguish my nobility? Oh, how queer you are, darling knight. Perhaps you’ll carry me to our destination too then?” Ayomide looked ready, and was the perfect size, to be princess carried.

Shinasi, however, remembered how heavy Ayomide felt when she leaned on him. She was short, and she was almost as equally stout. “No thanks, milady. I’ll let the ground have the honor of trembling under your boots.”

Ayomide rolled her eyes “Oh, how overwhelmingly smooth and kind you are. Ahem. Let’s go. The old man won’t wait for long.” She let her hand be held by Shinasi and led down stairs like a lady making her debut. Those stairs, she went down each one of them with care. Perhaps that was on odd thing to do, but after having been enslaved for your entire life, one tended to value the entire house that you owned as a free woman, even something as ordinarily insignificant as the stairs.

Outside, time had again treated Libertycave kindly. Snow on the streets had melted quickly, not that much had been left with all the pedestrians crushing the poor thing under their feet, and a few bits of grass had already popped out to cover the sides of the street. The crowd of people, rushing to-and-fro to get their work done in the morning, was hard to pass through as a couple. Libertycave felt like a real city, maybe even one to compete with Casamonu. There were stalls set up on the streets, showing the fruits of the burgeoning Libertycave’s industry: clay pots, slime soap, copper pots, slime jelly, rusty iron pots, dried slime membranes... Maybe it wasn’t the strongest or most versatile industry yet, but it was there at least, trying to keep itself up under quarantine.

Shinasi could see smoke billowing from far away. It was the many chimneys of the copperworks, or the steelworks, or whatever it was that day. He hadn’t seen those chimneys stop billowing ever since the dwarves had settled down. Even at night, when he’d wake up to have a bit of fresh air and a drink, he’d still see the smoke block out the moon. He couldn’t complain much about it considering he had gotten a brand spiffing new steel spear gifted to him thanks to that hard work.

After a few minutes, the couple were standing in front of the namesake cave of Libertycave. Not that it was visible anymore – the cave’s entrance now had stairs and a porch leading up to it, with a

simple wooden door covering the entrance. From the sides of the door hung two flags. First was the personal standard the Commander-in-Chief, the 33 stars and 13 stripes that looked a off-color due to the lack of quality dye up in the mountain. The other was the newly-adopted flag of the Republic, a tricolor of blue-white-green that had a seal depicting a black falcon breaking the chains of slavery and feudalism.



Shinasi nodded at the flag of the Republic, while Ayomide gave it a casual wave. For them, the vexillological business was noble business: a banner to represent a lord, a rag to represent the Imperial house, so on and so forth. Never had they seen a flag used to represent a group of otherwise nameless commoners. Shinasi had seen a few copies of the flag, simpler ones with only the tricolor, being flown from the houses he had passed in Libertycave. They approached the door, which had a sign that had “Office of the Commander-in-Chief” inscribed on it.

Opening it, the old man was already at his desk. The cave, the one that had started it all, was now the home of John Brown. He had a bed on one corner, and a desk on the other. A map, taken from the copper mine of the late Sir Satō-Wang, stood firmly nailed to the wall with countless sketches and ramblings noted on it. Brown was to be found... crawling on the ground, writing plans on to the cave’s floor with chalk. “Oh, welcome.” He finished writing a sentence before he got back on his two feet. His clothes had become as white as his hair with chalk. “Good weather today isn’t it, young lady.”

“Yes, I’m not surprised you’ve already noticed it, old man.” Ayomide cast a bit of wind magic to dedust Brown’s clothes. It proved a mistake as the chalk dust flew around everywhere, and for a few minutes only coughing could be heard in the cave. “**Cough**, sorry.”

“Ahem, **cough**, ahem! I appreciate the attempt, young lady, but do be more careful.” Now everyone had become as white as Brown. “It’s a closed cave, you’re going to suffocate us under chalk... anyways.” He pointed at all the writing on the ground. “We won’t be loitering in the mountain for much longer. In ten days, we’ll be out.”

“Ten days?” Ayomide looked skeptically at the ground. The writing was hard to read. “Maybe it’d be better for us to wait for them to attack us first.”

Brown shook his head “If they were such fools to do that, they would have attacked us much earlier. If they’re clever enough to know that we can’t stay for up long there, then they’re clever enough to expect our counterattack. A desperate attack on Casamonu, to retake the city and claim supplies for our survival. They have countless troops down there, patrolling the mountain, ready for our return.” Thanks to Tubman, he had a pretty good idea of who was where. “We can defeat them, if Providence is to assist us, if we prepare to sacrifice most of our forces, agree to a long siege, and loot the countryside dry for what food is left.”

“It’s a tough fight then... and a painful one.” Ayomide sighed. She was afraid, in all honesty, but she wasn’t a stranger to hard times. “So, we’re all setting out to Casamonu then?”

“Hm?” Brown had a grin, an unusually devilish one for such a pious man, appear on his old face “I was only talking about what the enemy expects us to do. We’re not going to Casamonu.”



Bookmarked by [FlyingLizards](#)

Bookmark Tags: [for later](#)

So curious about this but so busy. To the for later list it goes. Author if you're reading this I got this rec-ed in Tumblr if you're wondering. Good reviews too.

I can see you, reader. I noticed this from the fact that my notifications from AO3 were blowing up. (Note, this fic is on other websites as well, and I'd say that the best-maintained version is over at [RoyalRoad](#) where I first published it.)

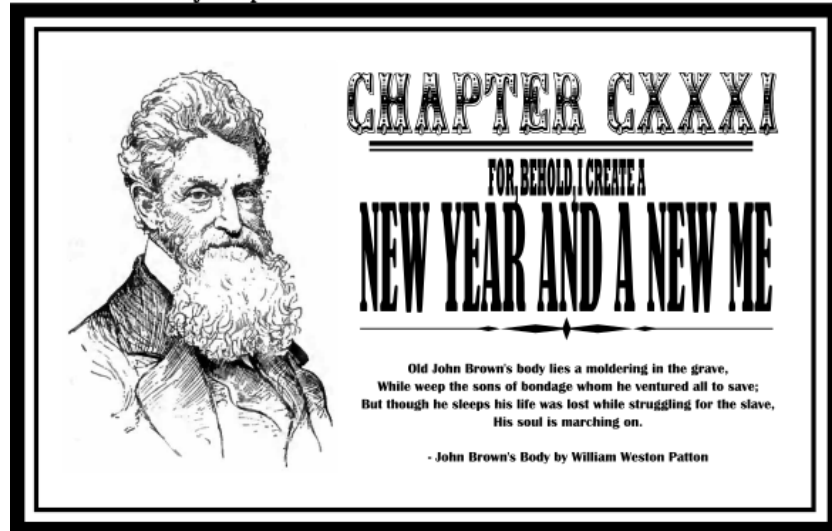
I've had a few people ask whether the JBI has a Discord server, and it does! Here is the invite link: <https://discord.gg/Qt3E8TnuHe>

Contributions to the TVTropes page is also welcome, over at: <https://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Literature/HisSoulsMarchingOnToAnotherWorld>

There's also r/JohnBrownIsekai for you who still use Reddit.

Chapter 138: Chapter CXXXI – For, behold, I create a new year and a new me.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 131



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

90th of Winter 5859 Libertycave, State of Casamonu

Night had come to Gemeinplatz once more, allegedly. To the residents of Libertycave, and many others in Gemeinplatz, tonight was as light as day. The freemen had pooled together what little they had, what they could afford to expend, for the New Year. Lanterns, ranging from crude ones put together by children to art pieces crafted by expert carpenters, hung up from the countless rooves of the young town. Countless slimes had been sacrificed at the alter of candlemaking to provide the fat needed for all this. The air smelt sweet, from all the sugary slime being burnt up, alongside all the sweets which were laid out on the streets. Tables had been dragged out of houses and lined up, for an endless feast that spanned the whole town.

“So, I can just take whatever, right?” Ayomide and Shinasi were making rounds, arm-in-arm.

“Yeah, that’s the whole purpose of people lining the tables up with food. You leave out some food, you get some food from others, something about sharing the bounties of the earth.” Unfortunately, there wasn’t much bounty left to share in Libertycave. Their food stocks had run low, and most of the food on display was slime-based. “Maybe next year, you’ll see a proper new year. This isn’t it...”

“Much better than the years where I was locked inside, no?” Despite saying that, Ayomide wasn’t eager to stuff herself with slime. She had gotten sick of the blue jelly creatures. Even seeing them had become an annoyance at this point. “When we’re back in Casamonu, we’ll have to compensate for this lackluster new year.”

“Aye, Lady-Captain-Princess.” Shinasi breathed a sigh of relief. “Thankfully, I have a bit of time to save up before we get there.”

“Right... The old man’s crazy plan. Let’s not think about that right now though, for today at least.” Ayomide found a barrel of beer which had been set up by a very generous person. “Today, we celebrate!” Borrowing two mugs, she raised her newly-filled mug up.

“To... what do we cheer for?” Shinasi took a brief look around him. The food was bland, the people looking poor and ragged, the air was cold... yet everyone had a smile on their faces. Those who had been evacuated from Casamonu, those with light skin, were sharing a drink and food with the freemen of Libertycave. He hadn’t been harassed by anyone for being in the presence of a catgirl, a demi-human, that he was clearly courting. At this moment, a brief spark to be soon gone or a genuine wildfire burning the old Gemeinplatz he knew not, everyone was an equal. “To... to our future!”

“To our future!” replied Ayomide, and they downed their drinks in sync “Peh, this tastes like donkey piss.”

“May the future hold drinks that don’t taste like piss then.” They left the mugs back on a nearby table and moved on. It was hard to move anywhere though, for the crowd was way too great in Libertycave at this ungodly hour. “I miss the days when this place was quieter.”

“You think? Would you rather have stayed alone with just me and the old man then?” shouted back Ayomide. She had no choice with so many people chatting around them.

“Take the old man out of the picture, staying alone with the young lady would be more than enough.” replied Shinasi, also shouting.

“Well, you’re doing that now, just with a couple extra people around! Wanna move somewhere quieter?”

“Yeah!”

With that the young couple slipped out of the streets, to celebrate in their own way.

“Jingle bells, jingle bells, jingle all the way...”

Watanabe climbed up his newest invention: the foldable stepladder. Not that he had done much work on it other than talk about stepladders to Rabanowicz and give her the idea. For a week, the doctor had worked tirelessly to bring it to life, and on the seventh day she had said “let there be stepladders”, and there were stepladders. Now it came useful, in helping Watanabe reach the top of a fir-like tree.

“Oh! What fun it is to ride, in a one-horse open sleigh. Hey!”

He placed a star, a very crude, handmade one of crumple-up copper foil. He had to hold and adjust the star until it looked like it’d behave and not immediately fall on the floor. He had to focus so much that he briefly stopped singing and only hummed while watching the star. After he was satisfied, Watanabe jumped down on the floor.

“...Hey!” Watanabe landed, and opened his arms as if he was an Olympic gymnast looking to get applause from the crowd. All he got was confused looks from his fellow otherworlders, who had gathered in the office of the Commander-in-Chief.

“What’s that song you’re singing, Mister Watanabe? I wasn’t expecting you to be able to sing in English too.” asked Brown, enjoying a warm cup of tea that he was swirling around with his hands.

“Oh? It’s *Jingle Bells*. I had worked part-time in college, at a convenience store, every Christmas they played it on loop. It’s been etched into my brain. I thought you’d know about it? It’s a classic.” Watanabe continued silently humming the tune even while Brown replied to him.

Brown shook his head “I know plenty of Christmas carols, but that one... no, it’s not familiar. It’s not the good, morally-nourishing sort of carol I’d prefer anyhow.”

“What sort would you prefer then? Would you sing us one?” Watanabe rested his arms on the table, ready to listen to a 19th century American sing.

“Ahem... If you so wish.” Brown cleared his throat, and began what was perhaps the first rendition of *God Rest Ye Merry, Gentlemen* in Gemeinplatz.

God rest you merry, gentlemen

Let nothing you dismay

For Jesus Christ, our Savior

Was born upon this day,

To save us all from Satan's power

When we were gone astray.

O' tidings of comfort and joy,

For Jesus Christ our savior

was born on Christmas day.

[...]

Now to the Lord sing praises,

All you within this place,

And with true love and brotherhood

Each other now embrace;

This holy tide of Christmas

All other doth deface.

O' tidings of comfort and joy.

Comfort and joy.

O' tidings of comfort and joy.

“...that is all. God bless ye gentlemen,” Brown noticed the only otherworlder woman, Doctor Rabanowicz, who was resting with a book on the corner “and ladies.” On the other corner was Nirmal, who had already fallen asleep.

Rabanowicz's eyes snapped open upon hearing herself be mentioned “Oh? Indeed, I'm currently busy blessing you all.” She raised the small, pocket-sized prayer book that she had ended up bringing over to Gemeinplatz when she got isekai'd. “*Adohe shelmiy Boczhe beraghicz koh le*, hm? I don't even know why I have been summoned here, considering I know nothing of your earthling tradition.”

“It's for fun! You'd all be staying and moping by yourselves if I didn't bring you all over here.” Watanabe walked around the room, trying to sound as cheery as possible “Come on, this is the only chance we'll have to rest in a while. Have some Christmas spirit!”

“It's way too late for Christmas, considering we are on the last day of winter, but I do agree. We're heading to war tomorrow gentlemen... and ladies. We have to be at our best.” Brown raised a glass of wine, one of the last glasses of wine left in Libertycave. “Don't celebrate in excess now, but let us at least enjoy what the Lord has graciously provided to us.”

“That's my captain!” Watanabe poured himself a glass too, the third one that night actually, and raised it.

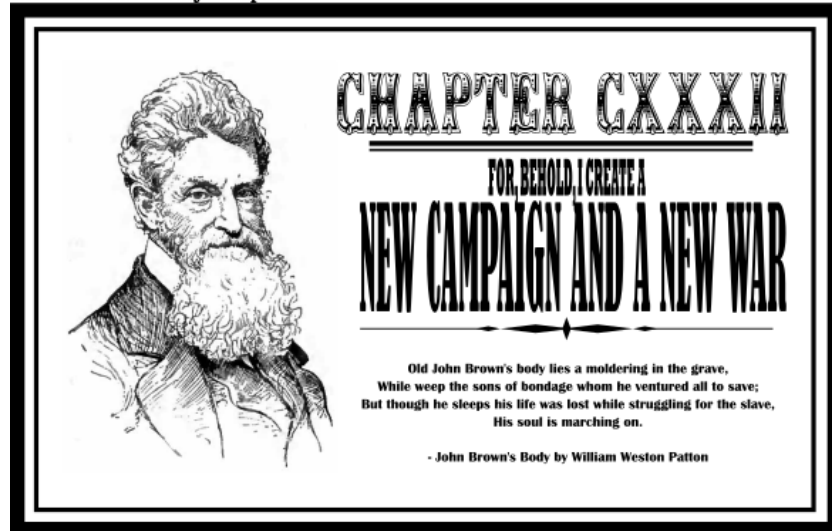
“...if you insist, I will have to partake.” Rabanowicz sighed, and joined in the glass-raising. “To our success.”

“To liberty.”

“To finding me a foxgirl wife!”

Chapter 139: Chapter CXXXII – For, behold, I create a new campaign and a new war.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 132



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

1st of Spring 5860 Outskirts of Mount Curry, State of Casamonu

The year of Our Divine, 5860.

Nobody exactly knew what that number meant, what the year 0 was. Some theorized that it was when the Empire of Gemeinplatz was first founded, some thought that maybe it was when the Divine was first prophesized, some thought that it was just a random number that somebody had made up at some point. No matter the original meaning of the year however, time had passed, it was the 1st day of Spring, and snowfall around Libertycave was getting thinner and thinner. The snow on the ground was still thick, and it would remain atop Mount Curry for a while longer, but the lowlands of Gemeinplatz looked all alive and green even from all the way up here.

“Ah, the great artist up above has painted us a great scene. Look at all that beautiful green.” Brown was on his horse, accompanied in front by the captains of the Federal Republic. Following them, in single file due to the narrow mountain path, were around three thousand troops and several hundred auxiliaries. Three regiments in total: the first made out of veterans from the League of Gileadites, the second made out of recruits from the State of Casamonu, and the third made out of the cavalymen of the Casamonu Host. The auxiliaries were comprised of the National Guards of Casamonu and Libertycave, they mostly carried around the old copper spears handed down by the regular units and were mostly there to guard/carry the supplies of the main army, work on clearing any obstacles on the road and scout ahead to make sure no enemy armies were to notice their comrades-in-arms. Some of the National Guard had been left behind in Libertycave, enough to repel an unexpected attack and protect against monsters. Following the soldiers was an uncounted number of camp followers from Libertycave: spouses of soldiers, craftsmen looking for work, sutlers looking to peddle their goods to the soldiery etc. Such a following of civilians accompanying armies was normal for any army in Gemeinplatz, or any pre-modern army for that matter.

“I think the shiny grey between us is even more beautiful” replied Ayomide, a line of pikes behind her. The copper spears of old were no more – now the infantrymen of the first regiment were equipped with pikes that were perhaps long enough to pierce the heavens themselves. A thousand pikes packed together in a tight formation certainly was terrifying, though it had taken Brown and co. a lot of headaches to make sure that they moved together in a coherent manner. All they could hope was that these pikemen could hold formation when the cavalry came knocking, or that they could mount an effective counterattack when the time came. There was also a small team of flintlock-armed infantrymen, a hundred of them, who were to be protected by these pikemen when a cavalry charge came. Other than the pikes, the infantry of the Republic had no defense – the only armor they had on was a thick gambeson, which could protect against a stray arrow shot or an unsharpened sword at best, accompanied by copper helmets which looked way too ancient for the 59th century. Basically, nothing had changed on the armor front since the League left Mount Curry to first besiege Casamonu, outside of a few bits of looted armor from enemy soldiers finding their way to the infantrymen.

“Maybe you’ll get to appreciate the beauty of nature a bit more once we’re down there ourselves, young lady.” Brown took a deep breath of the fresh mountain air. That’s one thing he’d miss for a while “Take in the sights, since we’ll be seeing some new ones.”

“Yeah, I was getting bored of Mount Curry. All white, all day, like my old patrons.” Ayomide looked back at Mount Curry. It was still snow-white. “Well, at least the mountain is more tolerable than the café.” Ayomide looked back down. It was going to be a long journey...

2nd of Spring 5860

Casamonu, County of Casamonu

Mayor Azvaran woke up, in his temporary residence over at Casamonu Castle. It had been how long... he had started to lose time as he constantly commuted back to Karabush and then back again to Casamonu, putting down rebellions, calming down anxious lords, doing whatever the Chancellor asked so that he could keep his position in the new order.

Now, with the new year, it was time for old anxiety to come back. The fugitives of Mount Curry would attack any day now, unless they were planning to starve themselves out. Azvaran was however clever enough to not underestimate these fugitives, and he was expecting them to try a brave last charge at the city. He had his troops stationed around Mount Curry, checking every exit to Casamonu, to make sure that they wouldn’t catch him by surprise. The mercenaries of Captain Habdank were still stationed in the city, ready to assist the army of Karabush in the defense. He had time. He could wait. The fugitives couldn’t.

Knock, knock. “Come in.”

“Good morning, Sir Azvaran.” It was his steward, a man of utmost unnoticeability. “We had a few families from Karabush who have agreed to settle in Casamonu. Now that the winter is over and the roads are clear, we should think about arranging a caravan to help them get here.”

“Right, right. You can take whatever you need from our treasury to arrange that. Make sure to hire a few guards for them too, things are rough out there. Remind the Chancellor too that he promised to send people over from the Capital.” With that, the steward bowed and left. Azvaran had been quite troubled by the fact that he had essentially inherited a ghost city, save for the traitors that he

had jailed. Thankfully nothing had crumbled down in a season, he still had a useable city and he wanted to keep it that way. Casamonu could be brought back to its former glory in a few years, with the right people, and finding capable people willing to receive housing and land in exchange for labor and loyalty wasn't hard. A lot of soldiers over from Karabush had already settled down in Casamonu, bringing their spouses and children over, so he already had a capable militia to defend the city if need be. Perhaps Casamonu being abandoned was a blessing in disguise, as Azvaran now got to resettle it with loyal people rather than having to deal with bickering urbanites and lords.

Knock, knock! "Come in!" Why did people have to interrupt his city-building fantasies constantly...

"Sir!" It was Evelyn-something-or-another de Habdank, entering the room with an excited salute. "Our scouts, they were ambushed by what must have been a group of fugitives. The skirmish happened on the half-built mountain highway, close to the city, where our men had some javelins thrown at them. We've yet to locate where the fugitive army is, they're probably trying to bypass our defenses by going through lesser-known paths, but they'll soon arrive in Casamonu judging from where the ambush happened."

"Oh, great!" Azvaran excitedly jumped up, before immediately returning to his seat. Both of the men were excited to get their business with the fugitives done so that they could move on to other things, but being excited about it openly would be uncouth. "Ahem, I mean, yes. Yes, your men are already ready, no?"

"We are, sir. We're ready to meet them when they come."

6th of Spring 5860

Casamonu, County of Casamonu

Mayor Azvaran woke up, in his temporary residence over at Casamonu Castle. It had been how long... he had started to lose time as he was waiting for the attack of the fugitives. He stormed out of his room in anger, not even bothering to dress up for the day "Four days!" Again, he had woken up to nothing.

Right outside his room was Habdank who, in anticipation of the attack, had taken residence at the castle so that he could coordinate quickly with his employer. "Four days..." He looked sullen more than angry, or perhaps bored he was simply bored out of his mind.

"Didn't that ambush happen right next to us? Then another, and a third one. How have your men not found a fugitive army marching towards us? They should've come here, tried a siege, and gotten defeated in all this time!" Azvaran was furiously pacing around the room, trying to find an explanation.

"Maybe they are somehow finding food for thousands of people on those desolate mountains? Maybe they have a magician capable of conjuring up food? No other way that they're planning on feeding such a large population otherwise. Or maybe they've given up on attacking us, or they're fools who think that we can provoked into an attack." Habdank was close to shrugging it off and leaving the city at this point.

"Or maybe we're lunatics and there are no fugitives up on that mountain." Azvaran stayed silent after that. Maybe he was seriously contemplating whether or not he was a lunatic. For a while,

nobody dared speak.

Knock, knock... “Come in, damn you!”

It was the steward. He was back, running up a sweat. “S-Sir!”

Azvaran swore that he was going to punch the man if he was about to talk about the budget or anything similarly banal “What is it, Bernard? Spit it out, you can’t make things much worse.”

“Our caravan, sir! We set off there, and when we were there... when...” The steward was wide-eyed, he was shaking, and he stuttered a bit more before he finally let it out “When... they! They were there!”

“Who, Bernard, your bloody in-laws?!”

“N-no! An army, the fugitives, sieging Karabush, with a massive force!”

Turns out that Bernard *could* make things much worse.

Chapter 140: Interlude – A close shave.

Watanabe Haruhi: A man of business, suave, and not being either of the two aforementioned things. He found himself awake in the workshop, having fallen asleep on the desk where he had been... “What was I doing?” He turned his head to find out the answer: a pile of papers lay right next to him. “Ah, right. Proposals to improve the printing press. That I needed to deliver to the printworks... uhm... yesterday.” His head instantly perked up “Oh. Oh crap.”

With great panic Watanabe rolled the papers up, put them under his shoulders, and before he could even process anything he saw, he had run to the printworks. Watanabe crashed through the door, panting like a dog under the summer sun “Excuse me!”

“Eek- oh, it’s Watanabe.” Azra Inkwell had fallen on to the ground, Shakira had drawn her sword towards the door, and a man that Watanabe didn’t realize was just kinda standing there. “Phew, you shocked me there. Don’t rush in like that.”

“Apologies, I just needed to deliver these.” Watanabe left the pile of papers on an empty press. Speaking of, the entire printworks was empty except for these three. “What’s with all this quiet? Also, why is Shakira in a dress, and what’s the deal with this other guy?”

Azra shook her head, groaning a bit internally “Both are because of the New Years. Everyone is off work today so that they can prepare, and I was just helping Shakira pick something to wear for the celebrations before you interrupted us.”

The ‘other guy’ butted in “Billy, sir. Shakira brought me in so that I could meet the lady to get a job here. I got caught up in all this celebration biz before I knew.” He was holding a mirror pointed towards Shakira, which he had been doing for almost an hour by this point on the orders of his employer.

Shakira herself had finally calmed down and put her comically oversized blade down. She sat down, legs and arms crossed in a fashion that conflicted with the elegance of her dress. A silk dress, embroidered with roses and other flowers that Watanabe couldn’t name, complete with frills and a spiffing hat. Her hair had been combed to perfection by Azra, though one’s eyes tended more to focus on the giant scar next to Shakira’s eyes rather than her hairdo when looking at her head. “What are you looking at? You don’t look much better.”

“Do I?” Watanabe realized that he hadn’t looked at himself in a mirror since he dropped in to Gemeinplatz. Not that he hadn’t tried – but mirrors were quite rare in a world where they were made usually made out of silver. “Can I borrow that for a sec?”

“Hm? Sure.” Billy handed Watanabe the mirror, who quickly turned it towards his face. It was the clearest image that he had gotten of himself in a long while – and Watanabe had to agree. He didn’t look good. His hair, usually already messy by its nature, had started to look as wild as Shinasi’s hair. His facial hair, normally clean cut as any good office worker’s is, had begun to form a beard for the first time in Watanabe’s life. One thing that had stayed intact was his blue blazer, red tie and jeans, perfect business casual even in another world.

“Oh, goodness. I need to shave.” Now, that was certainly a problem to have. “Where... how do I shave around here? Razors? Shaving cream? Do you have any of those?”

Billy scratched his clean-shaven chin “I don’t know what a shaving cream is sir, but we have razors. The guys over at the copperworks sell them for very cheap.”

“Copperworks? Right, those guys have everything.” Watanabe bowed farewell to the dress-up group, and made the short distance from the printworks to the copperworks. He hadn’t actually bought anything for himself yet, for he had a knack for borrowing whatever he needed from others and surviving off of that. “Razor, razor...” He headed to the nearest stall packed with copper whatnots “Razor?” he said while making a shaving motion with his hands.

“Razor?” replied the salesman emptily, before realizing that he was being requested one. He searched around the stall until he handed Watanabe a razor... a straight razor.

“What...” Watanabe fumbled around with what he had been handed. It had a handle, and long blade at the end that folded into the handle. “Is this a knife? This is not a razor.”

“That’s a razor?” Watanabe fumbled with the thing he was handed even more, getting more puzzled by the second. “How do you even use this?”

“Like this.” The shopkeeper procured another razor for himself. Then he simply put the knife on his cheek, a bit close to his neck, and slid it up, cutting a few strands of hair along the way.

Watanabe held his breath, thinking that the man was about to stab himself, but he was fine and uninjured. He looked at the razor in his hands, shaking. Was he supposed to swing this thing around right next to his eyes and throat? It looked suitable for trimming people wide open rather than trimming their hair. He raised the razor up a bit, then down, before giving up and handing the razor back with an apology. There was one last person who Watanabe thought could help him...

“Old man!” Watanabe barged into the office of the Commander-in-Chief “I am in need of urgent help!”

“Oh?” Brown jumped up from his seat upon hearing of the word ‘urgent’ “What is urgent, young man? Do you need troops? Spears? A canon?”

“No, I need to shave my face!” Watanabe ran up to Brown and his magnificent beard “Tell me your secrets! What do you use?”

“What...” Brown opened a drawer in his desk and took out a straight-edge razor. “I use a razor, of course. The dwarves gifted me this one.”

“You too? O’ cruel fate...” lamented Watanabe upon seeing the sight of the dreaded blade.

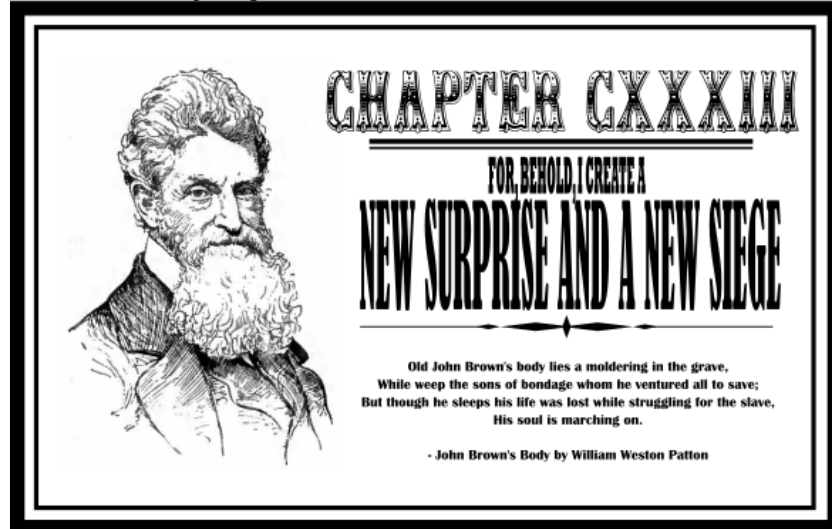
“Doesn’t anyone here have a normal razor?”

“This is a normal razor, though?”

“Of course, you’d call that a normal razor...” Watanabe looked again at the ‘normal razor’. It was sharp. Bright. Intimidating. A relic of a bygone era he’d normally have never experienced. There was only one thing he could do at this point. Give a polite bow, and “Please teach me how to use it.”

Chapter 141: Chapter CXXXIII – For, behold, I create a new surprise and a new siege.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 133



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

7th of Spring 5860 Karabush, League of the Three Cities

Brown was back in his natural habitat: outdoors, camping, chilling, surrounded by armed people plotting to overthrow the local government, as is the usual activities of a man stepping into his sixties. No retirement plan, no 401(k), just an old man in his element. His tent was filled with people going in and out, whether to report on the situation, or just to talk to the old man and get some encouragement.

Vaiz came in, stopping right in front of Brown (who was sitting on the ground due to a lack of seating) and straightening his skullcap before he spoke “Captain, the garrison of Karabush has refused to surrender. Their commander says that they’ll wait for the army of the mayor to return and break the siege.”

“That makes sense, I cannot blame them.” Brown stood up, stretching his arms in anticipation of action. “How did they treat you?”

Vaiz wondered how this had any relevance, but he replied anyways “The commander invited me for tea, we talked for a bit, and he personally escorted me out of the gates once we were done. A pretty standard reception all around.”

“How were the people around you armed?” asked Brown “You must have seen a few of his troops around him.”

“Ah, that? They didn’t seem too heavily armed. Nor did they seem much like soldiers honestly, the men were armed about as well as ours. Gambeson, spear, helmet, about that much.”

“Then, it seems that I was right. The mayor brought all his trained soldiers to Casamonu, thinking that we’d be fighting to retake the city right next to us. The people we sent over to skirmish near

the mountains helped them not think of any other possibility. Now..." Brown headed out the tent, Vaiz in tow. "Now, we have to get inside these walls before the mayor arrives."

The walls of Karabush stood in the distance. Unlike the ancient walls of Casamonu, an ancient border city, Karabush's walls looked much less grand. A couple of the poorer neighborhoods of the city were even situated outside it, though they were deserted now that a force had come to siege them down. The walls were perhaps about as tall as three men, and they didn't look too thick or well-maintained. "Now, only if we had some secret underground tunnels to infiltrate the city from."

Vaiz could only ask "...d-do we have secret underground tunnels here too?"

Brown couldn't help but chuckle "Of course not, I can't conjure up miracles. However, we can conjure up ladders." He walked towards a group of soldiers in the camp who had been busy at work in the last few days. "These. They should be long enough to climb over the wall." Silly as they looked, siege ladders were very much a respectable part of siege warfare. "That, and a bit of help from Ayomide's cannon, we'll be making our way inside today."

"Today?"

"Today. We don't have much time, and everything should be ready by now. We were only waiting to make sure that the people inside weren't willing to surrender. Now that you're back..." Brown stopped a soldier running nearby. Then from there the soldier went to their captain. In about half an hour word spread around and the army had been gathered into formation. This time they looked grander not just due to being greater in number, but also due to the regimental banners and the Republic's flag floating around that made them look much more organized. The tall pikes piercing the heavens, the matching uniforms, this was certainly an army that was beginning to look like one.

BOOM!

The first shot came from Ayomide, and her canon. The gate to the city was immediately shattered as the cannonball exploded and tore it into pieces. The defenders of the city rushed to the gate to protect the chokepoint, though the Republic's army stayed away from the gates for now. The 1st Ranger Regiment (the veterans from the League) inched closer to the gate, pikes being tilted down in anticipation of contact, while another group of soldiers from the 2nd Infantry Regiment (those recruited from Casamonu) began carrying the siege ladders forward towards the walls. Those carrying the siege ladders were protected by their comrades carrying shields, though a few fell as they were fired upon from the walls. The 2nd Regiment began climbing up the ladders and into the walls, a brutal fight beginning to have themselves be let on the walls by its defenders.

Then came the actual battle.

The 1st Regiment, still in front of the gate, inched closer and closer to the line of troops from the garrison defending the gate. Right before making contact, they paused, and a group of musketeers emerged from inside their formation. "Fire!"



A line of muskets suddenly unloaded all their shot upon their enemies which stood so close that they could see eye-to-eye. Accuracy didn't matter from so close. Armored, unarmored, noble or peasant, the musket cared not. A hundred men on the enemy side either died instantly or were incapacitated by the massive lead balls passing through them. The smoke from the muskets obscured vision, and before the garrison could recover their senses, a terrifying mess of shouts, insults and battle cries began closing in on them from the smoke.

For a moment there was nothing in sight of the garrison, but grey smoke and the shouts of men. Then the shining, sharp heads of the pikes pierced through the fog, the men carrying them barely visible as dark smudges beyond the smoke. The disorganized garrison, who mostly consisted of citizens conscripted to defend the city with whatever weapons they had, couldn't even begin approaching the men behind the pikes. They were slowly pushed back, the smoke slowly clearing as some members of the garrison began exploiting gaps in the pike wall to move forward and begin attacking the soldiers of the 1st Regiment. The garrison still held the advantage of holding the chokepoint at the gate, and they seemed determined to not give up their advantage.

The standoff at the gate continued without much change, a few pikemen falling while an equal amount of garrison members were impaled by the pikes. Time was passing though, and it passed, until the men of the 2nd Regiment had defeated the men atop the walls and they had begun to make their way to the melee. The garrison slowly pulled away from the pikes, trying to focus more on the people who were now flanking them from behind.

As the pikes gained distance from the garrison, who were now wavering, the musketeers again emerged from the back of the line with their weapons reloaded. Another volley. Another hundred men dead instantly, out of a dwindling number of men in the garrison. This time, there didn't need to be another valley as the remaining members of the garrison began making their flight away from the soldiers of the Republic. Nobody there was willing to risk being counted amongst the dead in another volley.

The dead were left on the street, some tripping over the corpses while trying to run.

7th of Spring 5860
Mayor's Mansion, Karabush

Blue. White. Green.

The tricolor of Gemeinplatz was hanging from the mayor's mansion in the center of the city.

"You have fought fairly and achieved victory over us. Please have mercy on us as the Divine commands." The commander of Karabush's garrison knelt down, laying his sword down on the ground right in front of Ayomide. Unlike Casamonu, with its castle on the hill, Karabush lacked any defensive structures inside the city; not to mention that the garrison wasn't motivated to fight when their mayor was absent. The surrender had come immediately after the army of the Republic had politely knocked on the door of the absent mayor.

"Thank you for the gift, it's much appreciated" commented Ayomide sarcastically as she picked up the well-furbished blade. There was a crowd of citizens who had gathered around the mansion, looking at the new flag in shock and fear.

They had expected the fugitive problem to be over after the mayor had made his way to Casamonu.

The last thing they had expected was for the fugitives to be the ones arriving at Karabush.

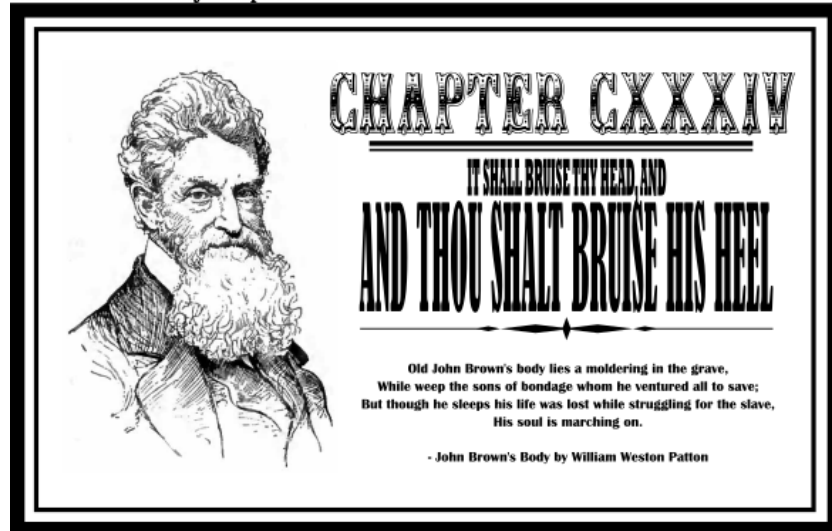
Brown began reciting his part of the surrender ceremony "The regular city folk among you is free to leave. To the noblemen and other wealthy folk: effective from this moment onwards, all of your slaves and indentured servants are free. You are not free to leave the walls of this city until we have held court for each one of you, and your former slaves and servants shall act as witnesses."

The declaration of Brown was met with much less shock from the crowd. Rumors had already spread of the "lunatics" over in Casamonu. There was silent resignation at these rumors coming through, as the end times came to their city and the "Demon King" with his "Anti-Hero" had arrived.

Today, on the 7th of Spring 5860, Karabush was no longer in Imperial control.

Chapter 142: Chapter CXXXIV – It shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 134



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

9th of Spring 5860

Karabush, League of the Three Cities State of Karabush

Mayor Azvaran was on his horse, wishing that he could gallop forth and see what the hell had just happened. He couldn't – he knew that he'd be skewered by a volley of arrows if he rushed to the walls of Karabush by his lonesome, so he patiently had to trot along with his army. "For goodness' sake, how did we miss a whole army marching to *my* city?"

"It's a bit too late to think about that, sir" replied Habdank, who was tired of hearing the same question from his employer for the umpteenth time. "We'll clear them out of Karabush in no time. We still have the same number of men as we did before."

Azvaran continued grumpily grumbling for a while more, while Habdank did his best to keep his employer calm and satisfied. At this point he just wanted to get his payment and be done with this military campaign that had dragged on for far too long. He was half-asleep on his horse by the time the walls of Karabush had become visible in the distance. "O-oh, there we are" he groggily muttered while dragging his head up. "Should I get the men prepared for a siege, sir?"

"Let's see whether they'll surrender first." Mayor Azvaran grabbed a white flag from an aide, and rode forward while holding the flag up. "We wish to parlay!"

An old man popped up from behind wall "We too, gentlemen, we've seen you coming from a mile away. Surrender, or turn back, if you wish to avoid great embarrassment and bloodshed."

The mayor was taken aback. His line about surrender had just been stolen! "You're the ones who are surrounded here. These walls won't protect you for long."

"That flat plain won't protect you for long either." Suddenly, an explosion appeared in the sky, way above the mayor's troops. Ayomide had shot a warning shot with the canon. "We have a fully

armed catgirl, and she is *not* in a good mood.”

“What does an explosion have to do with a catgirl...” asked Azvaran to himself, not loud enough for Brown to hear. He raised his voice once more “Then sir, we shall have to siege you down.” The mayor turned around and rode back to Habdank “Prepare for a siege. We’ll let them starve.”

“Sir, what about the payment for my men?” asked Habdank. “It’s the 9th. We should have been paid nine days ago for this season. My men don’t want to stand around with their pockets empty.”

“I’ll ask my steward to pay you with gold from... the... treasury?” Azvaran’s voice trailed off while he remembered that Azvaran’s treasury wasn’t accessible at the moment. “We’ll assault the city then, prepare the cannons for a breach!”

“Which cannons, sir? You had them sent back to Karabush since the siege of Casamonu never happened. All our siege engineers were on vacation in the city.”

“Just take them out of storage- oh.” Azvaran again remembered where he was sieging. “Oh.” He looked at the lines of men on the walls, some with what looked to be firearms, the rest with menacing pikes peeking up. “Oh...”

“I don’t think my men would agree to a suicidal charge up the wall even if I asked them. Especially since their pockets are empty.” Habdank and Azvaran started awkwardly at each other. Both knew very well what Habdank was implying.

“...”

“...?”

“...”

“...yeah.” Azvaran tilted his head down in defeat. “I can’t pay you.”

“Then me and my men shall take our leave to greener pastures. Good luck, sir.” Habdank gave one last salute, and then rode away from the mayor. Mercenaries weren’t famous for their loyalty, after all, and a broke mayor offered nothing to him but a suicidal battle.

Azvaran watched the mercenaries disappear into the horizon, then he turned back to the men on the walls. The walls. Those damned walls that he couldn’t even dream of breaking down, let alone assaulting them successfully with all those men guarding it. He was a mayor without a city, except for Casamonu which had been left as a ghost town. “Oh.”

The mayor silently dispensed a few curse words at whatever misfortune had gotten him to this situation.

9th of Spring 5860 **On top of the walls, Karabush**

“They’re retreating? Boo.” Ayomide, sitting on top of her canon, was slightly disappointed at not getting another chance to shoot her shot.

Brown, who unlike Ayomide was happy to avoid bloodshed, mused “In war one shall be despoiled by his enemies, in peace one shall be despoiled by his mercenaries.”

“...the mercenaries abandoned him while we were at war though?”

Brown chuckled “You’re quite observative, young lady.” He continued patiently observing the mayor’s army down below. They were standing too far away to be hit by canon shot, standing in the open field. A few of the enemy men had begun preemptively cutting wood and setting up tents, but the rest of the enemy army seemed to be standing aimlessly.

Slowly, however, the enemy army moved. A cheer erupted from the walls “They’re retreating!” The mayor’s army was slowly moving away from the city, clearly having given up on scaling the walls. They had a formation that was as broken as their spirits, with the men coalescing to a scattered blob.

“So, we’re letting them go away?” asked Ayomide. She was *really* disappointed now. “They don’t seem to have many men left.”

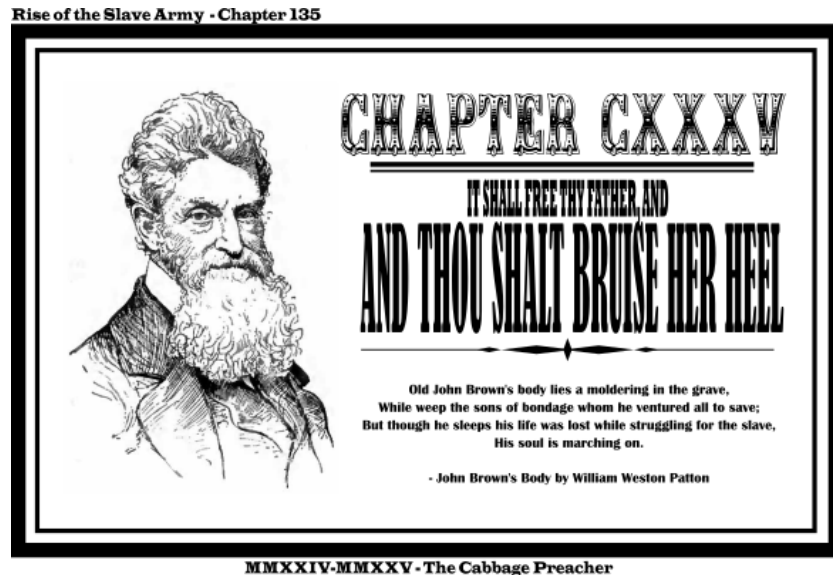
“Young lady, the battle only starts now. Get your men ready for a sortie.”

Ayomide didn’t get how they could catch up to men who were at least a hundred meters away, but she obliged and got the 1st Regiment to gather up near a gate closest to where the mayor’s troops were. Through the gate, made of metal bars, she could barely see the retreating men. “Why are we even standing here...”

Before Ayomide could question her life choices further, her questions were answered by charging cavalymen. A whole load of them. The Casamonu Host had been camping in the woods nearby, and they were eager to finally enter combat. “Open the gates!” she shouted, and soon the 1st Regiment was flooding out of the city. The mayor’s army had been forced to a stop to defend themselves against the cavalry. The 1st Regiment quickly caught up to the mayor’s forces, their pikes pushing against the mayor’s men as the cavalry continued to harass them. It was utter chaos in the battle line, the pikes slowly lost their formation as the men pushed forward, while the mayor’s men hadn’t been given any time to get in formation for anything.

In this mess of men, Mayor Azvaran was unceremoniously felled by a musket shot, while his men were completely broken by the counter-attack by the army of the Republic.

Chapter 143: Chapter CXXXV – It shall free thy father, and thou shalt bruise her heel.



11th of Spring 5860 The depths of Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

Clang, clang, clang-a-lang-a-lang-a...

Yaz Inkwell was clanging the bars of his cell. His fingers travelled to, and then to fro, making something akin to a metallic melody of boredom. He looked back at his cellmates, who were equally bored and slumped in a corner. They had exhausted all topics of conversation a season ago. Their only entertainment was either making music with the cell bars, or following specs of dust dancing around the rays of light entering from the one window which was too high to look outside from.

Sigh. Clang, clang-lang-a-lang. Clang.

The clangs echoed throughout the empty halls of the dungeon. Not the fun dungeon full of monsters – it was the boring type of dungeon full of monsters. There were no guards around, for nobody expected the noblemen to do something crazy like jumping out of the dungeon. It was on a tower after all – a high one, and Yaz would become a fine red splat on the ground if he made his way out the window.

Clinkity-clink-clang. Clang-lang... Tap-tap-tap?

The clangs were interrupted by... footsteps? They sounded awfully quick and panicked compared to usual. “Huh, are they coming to execute us or something?” he asked.

“Thank the Divine if that’s the case” answered a fellow inmate.

Yaz couldn’t help but grumble in agreement. At this point he wasn’t afraid of death. He just wanted it over. He stood up, fixed his suit, and prepared to meet a dignified death. “Come and get me, you knaves! Come and... come.. come?”

The soldiers definitely weren't ones from the mayor who had imprisoned them, judging from their skin color. No, they wore a familiar blue gambeson and copper helmet combo. "Good morning, mister mayor. I hope you're doing well?" asked one of the men.

"W-what? W-when?" Yaz stammered and trembled. The rest of his cellmates were as shocked as him, making similar disorganized sounds of disbelief.

"The mayor has had a bit of an accident, along with the rest of the troops." The man calmly stuck a key inside the cell door, and in a moment, it was open. "You're free now, go do whatever."

"...why?"

"The captain thinks your imprisonment has been punishment enough." The soldier stepped aside. "Come on now, I don't have all day to hold this open."

Yaz stumbled forward like a newborn lamb, still in disbelief. He had personally seen the army of the mayor, how grand it was, and comparatively how downtrodden the fugitives were. Perhaps this was some sort of sick prank? He raced down the stairs of the dungeon tower, going down and down, until he was out the door and into the yard of the castle.

The scene in the yard helped Yaz be sure that he wasn't being played around with. None of the mayor's men were around to be seen. The Earlywatch family banner, of Mayor Azvaran Earlywatch, was nowhere to be seen. It was replaced by a banner as-of-yet unfamiliar to Yaz, one that certainly wasn't like the usual familial crests of Gemeinplatz.

A festive mood was in the air, as the freemen of the Republic had lit a great bonfire in the middle of the yard. Men were sitting around it, some having even brought out instruments to sing tunes, some enjoying a good drink, and the rest were laying down on the grass to rest after an arduous march.

The old noble man Yaz felt himself as if he was in an otherworld all of a sudden. The citizens of Casamonu, once wary of the newcomers, were dancing and making merry alongside the fugitives. Light and dark, sharing a drink, a cheer, a song for their liberation from the foreign mayor. If the Empire hadn't left Casamonu a season ago, it definitely had left the city today. The only remnants, as Yaz noticed, were a few prisoners of war from Karabush who were being escorted to the tower where the dungeon was. There, in an unassuming outfit and position in the middle of everyone was the old man John Brown that had so defeated Yaz and his Imperial allies. He stepped forward to say a few words to the old man, before he was interrupted by a shout speeding towards him "Papa!"

The old Inkwell almost collapsed on to the ground as the younger Inkwell tackled him for a hug. "Oh, I'm so glad you're well!" She was crying on his chest, while pounding it lightly with her fist "Why did you do something so foolish? Why would you stay behind?!"

The old nobleman Inkwell could explain himself. The father Inkwell couldn't. He let his suit be ruined by the tears and snot, while gently caressing the head of his daughter. Yaz really didn't know what to say. Especially when there was a tall muscular lady with an enormous sword in the background gazing at him judgmentally. "I-I don't think I'll try and leave for the Empire again, dear."

"Of course, you won't! I'd suspect you to have become a lunatic if you still wanted to." Azra wiped her tears off with a handkerchief and handed it to Shakira.

“It was the honorable decision to-” Yaz shut up when he realized how angry Shakira was becoming. He certainly didn’t want to be suddenly cut in half, or choked to death. “Y-yeah, I won’t. It was a stupid decision.”

“Right?” Azra took his hand “Come on, you gotta join the festivities! There’s a dwarf selling really delicious donuts, and then we gotta see the captain and-”

Yaz was already getting dragged away by his daughter, as if nothing had happened. The Empire, all he had known was collapsing around him, a time of certain uncertainty, and yet...

“...some things never change.” Yaz said with a tear in his eye. Perhaps the world he know may crumble, but in the future, there were still things to preserve and look forward to.

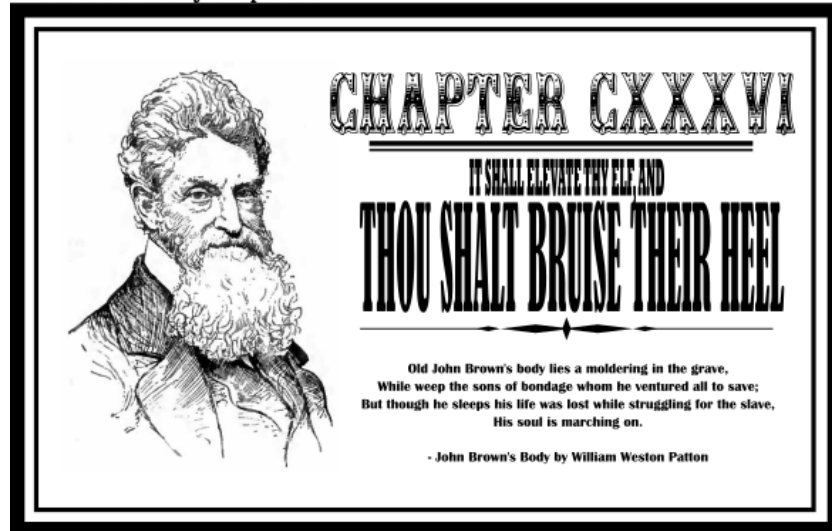
His somber comment was ignored as Azra was too busy haggling for some donuts. She was so excited that she didn’t even notice her heel being bruised while running to and fro.



An Ayomide, from the awesome [labrador44!](#)

Chapter 144: Chapter CXXXVI – It shall elevate thy elf, and thou shalt bruise their heel.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 136



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

14th of Spring 5860
Aroghlie, Zon'guldac

Tinatin Leafblower, Supreme Chieftain of All Elves in Gemeinplatz and Marchioness of Zon'guldac, Destroyer of the Dwarves, she who has sitting comfortably on a throne in Aroghlie, legs crossed and arms at rest, being fanned by several servants. She had seized the mansion of some human merchant, the grand dwarven homes down below were too musty and dark for her.

Life was great for Leafblower. The troublesome dwarves had elected to flee the city, and she had allowed them to do so by not guarding the exits to Aroghlie, and the ones left where the quiet types who didn't intend on causing trouble. She had heard the mayor next door have some troubles with the fugitives, but even if they weren't dealt with, she was sure that no bunch of fugitive slaves could scale the walls of Aroghlie as she did with Imperial help. The savages could stay in their own city for all she cared.

A polite knock on the door. Then a familiar sight entering in: a man from the protection squadron. His goosestep looked so silly that Leafblower had to keep herself from guffawing and blowing the mouthful of grapes she was chewing right into the man's face. Then he did that ridiculous straight-arm salute, added an "Hail the Emperor!", and clanged his boots together. Leafblower would have had the man summarily executed for mocking her if not for the fact that the Protection Squadron were under direct control of the emperor.

"Yeah, yeah, hail the emperor." Leafblower replied with a straight-arm salute of her own, though she was much less fervent than the lackey in front of her.

The soldier took out a printed piece of paper and began reading "Hail the Emperor. The Chancellor sends his best regards, and asks you to help the Mayor of Karabush in the fight against the fugitives if possible. We haven't received any news from Karabush in a while, so we assume that a battle has yet to occur. Make sure that the mayor deals with the fugitives with minimal casualties."

Leafblower chewed the last grape, lazily, leisurely, delaying her response as much as she could. She spat out the grape's seed inside a bowl held by a servant and replied "You're a bit too late. The mayor is dead, it's caused quite the fuss around these parts."

"What do you mean the mayor is dead? Did he contract a disease?" asked the soldier sheepishly.

"He was killed in battle with the fugitives. Karabush has fallen as well" replied Leafblower, still as uncaring in attitude.

"A-are you serious?"

"Do I look like I'm *not* serious?"

The soldier pondered the question seriously for a brief second. Her legs were crossed, she was still snacking, and her head was resting on her hand as if she was about to fall asleep. The answer he had to give was obvious "Apologies, my lady."

"The fugitives prove way more powerful than the mayor and his formidable army. While I am loyal to the chancellor and the emperor, I won't be going on a suicidal charge against the fugitives. I think Sir Spear would agree on that point also if he knew that the mayor had fallen. He needs to send Imperial troops here if he wants the problem to be fully gone." Leafblower shooed the soldier away with her hand.

"Go on, make haste."

14th of Spring 5860

Imperial Highway №04-765, Libertycave

There is no rest for the wicked, or for roadworkers. The latter were out in force today, with shovels, pickaxes, and a whole load of gravel.

Rabanowicz was on the side of the road, running to and fro, carrying a rope at one end while the other end was carried by Watanabe. This pair was always at the front, with Rabanowicz not able to rest until she had measured, remeasured, demeasured and remeasured again to make sure that the road was going straight. Watanabe was mostly along there for the ride as a professional rope-carrying lackey. All this running around had made him miss winter as he cleaned a bead of sweat travelling down his forehead.

"Watanabe, hold that rope straight! You can wipe your forehead all you want after you're done."

"Yes, ma'am."

"It's *doctor!*"

"Yes, doctor..."

Watanabe raised his head again, to see a surprising sight. The woods were over, so were the endless farms around them. There it was, close by enough to see with the naked eye: Azdavay. "It seems we'll be finishing this part of the highway today."

“A bit late, if not for the mayor’s army” replied Rabanowicz, sounding like she was only annoyed at her schedule being shifted by a whole season rather than the whole “invading army” thing.

A small group of curious onlookers gathered around them as the road builders approached the town. Watanabe didn’t really get why people found entertainment in watching them work – perhaps these people didn’t have better entertainment options for that day. He couldn’t deny that there was some level of entertainment in manual labor, certainly better than having sat in an office chair for several years even if his muscles ached and yearned for a seat at this moment.

As the sun began setting, setting the sky ablaze with red, the road finally reached the gate of the city. The workers were tired, but they found the strength to all let out a cheer as the final clump of gravel was shoveled on to the road. “All right, all drinks are on me tonight!” shouted one man, and an even bigger cheer erupted as the crowd of workers began flowing into the city.

Watanabe was awkwardly watching from the sidelines, as he had found himself a tree stump to finally rest on. He yawned, feeling sleepy while looking at the falling sun. He had a lot to complain about in that moment. About his aching back. His aching front. Okay, everything was aching now that he thought about it. Still, when he saw the locals of Azdavay crowd around the workers, giving them thanks, when he saw the road that he helped build... he couldn’t help but raise a faint smile. In the office he had dealt with numbers much larger, matters seemingly much greater, but none of it had felt like it mattered as much as this one crappy road.

“Monsieur, aren’t you going to go with them?” Watanabe jumped when Rabanowicz suddenly appeared behind him. “I heard you like a good party or two.”

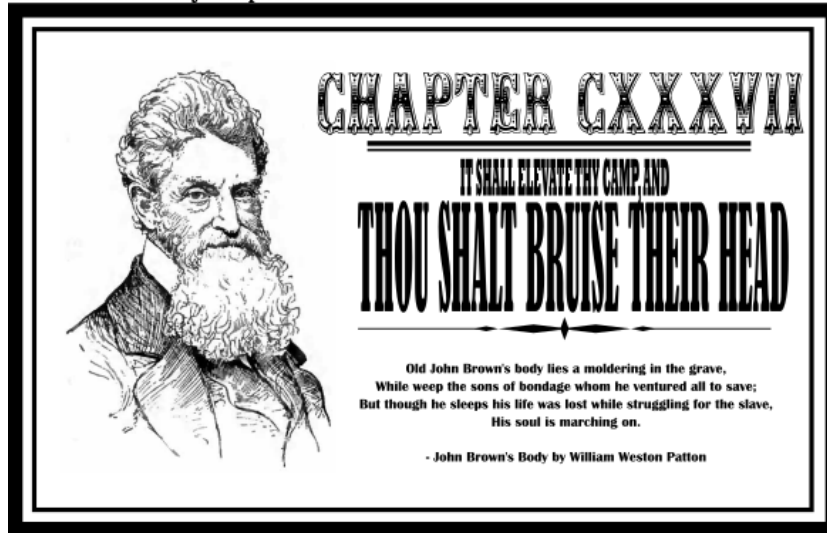
“I guess I should, to let out all this exhaustion.” Watanabe groaned as he got up from the stump. “Won’t you join?”

“No, those kinds of gatherings are not for an educated, godly woman like me.” Rabanowicz gave a pat on the back “You men have fun; I’ll go back to Libertycave.”

“Aye aye, doctor.” Watanabe stretched and began making his way into Azdavay for a fun night out.

Chapter 145: Chapter CXXXVII – It shall elevate thy camp, and thou shalt bruise their head.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 137



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

15th of Spring 5860

Work Camp №4, Karabush

One would think that an abandoned temple and its grounds would invite serenity. Walls overgrown with vines, grounds covered in tall grass, an aura of the days gone by lingering in each and every crumbling brick.

However, as the inmates of Work Camp №4 woke up inside their barracks, they certainly weren't feeling serene. Their beds were barely able to be called beds, just thin wooden slabs with hay stacked on top if they were lucky, stacked inside the smallest room in the former temple. There was a soldier, of the Protection Squadron, knocking wildly on the door to wake them all up. Nobody was in the mood to wake up today, or on any other day in this godforsaken place, but they also weren't willing to receive a beating by the guy beating the door.

Backs aching, mostly everyone got up from their bed. The guard went to check on the few who didn't. They had died during the night, either from the heat or from some sort of sickness. Giving a beating couldn't get dead people up, so he simply ordered a few of the inmates to dispose of the corpses. No rites, not a single prayer, these men were simply tossed over the wall. The wolves, or slimes, would deal with them well enough.

First thing in the morning was the serving of slop. It was officially called "food graciously granted by His Imperial Majesty". Referring to watered down gruel with that title would normally get one executed for lese majesty, but it was the official title given by the Chancellor so everyone had to conform to it. The inmates lined up in the yard with their bowls as a very tired guard served cold gruel from a pot which had most likely not been cleaned ever since the reign of the first emperors.

Cold gruel! Some baked wheat, some slime, and goodness, it makes for an awful time. When one had nothing else however, the gruel had to be downed even if starvation seemed like the more pleasant

choice. Those who wasted the food so-graciously granted by dumping it would, of course, be punished accordingly.

The end of meal time signaled the start of work time: cutting stones delivered from a nearby quarry. The New Empire needed new fortifications after all, and bricks weren't going to manufacture themselves. Even if bricks could manufacture themselves, the Chancellor would make sure that these inmates would save something to do. As was stated, crudely painted on the bricks of the entrance, "Work is what sets you free."

As the sun rose up, the guards found the inmates increasingly difficult to deal with. Some would faint from the heat. A beating, and some would find the strength to rise back up for work. Some would simply never rise up again. Again, the wolves would deal with them soon enough. They had a debt to pay the Emperor and Chancellor after all – for their freedom, a lifetime of work no matter how short their life may end up being. Though, it had been a while since the people in the camp had heard any communication from either... By the midday, a ruckus – the guards had scrambled out of the yard where the inmates were working. The inmates were far too tired to initially take notice of their absence.

Outside, there was a completely different scene. Two dozen men on horseback, lead by a familiar woman. Harriet Tubman, complete with a newly-manufactured flintlock pistol, accompanied by cavalry equipped with flintlock carbines. "Open the gates and surrender, or we'll be unloading these upon all of you" she shouted while pointing her pistol at a guard nervously staring from behind the gate. However, the cavalry couldn't scale the walls. They were a bit too tall for the horses to jump through, and they had no siege engines.

For a while, there was an awkward standoff at the gate of the camp. Nobody shot at each other, waiting for the other side to give up and leave. Tubman shouted again "If you don't give the people in here freedom, I shall free your head from your shoulders!" No response. The outnumbered guards were way too scared to even say a word. Nobody wanted to be the poor bloke who spoke up and got a whiff of lead into his face. The weapons of these fugitives looked strange, but they were close enough to hand cannons that the guards understood them to be firearms.

Eventually, Tubman gave a deep sigh, quickly recited a prayer, and shouted "That's enough negotiating." She raised the axe she carried, rode forward towards the gate and shouted "Fire!" A few guards had raised their heads up from the wall to take a shot at Tubman – the cavalry disappeared into gunpowder smoke, while the guards on the walls disappeared into red mist. With a few whacks Tubman cracked open the admittedly ramshackle gate, while the cavalry emerged from the fog behind her with axes drawn. What few guards that were left on the ground were quickly overrun and dropped their weapons to surrender.

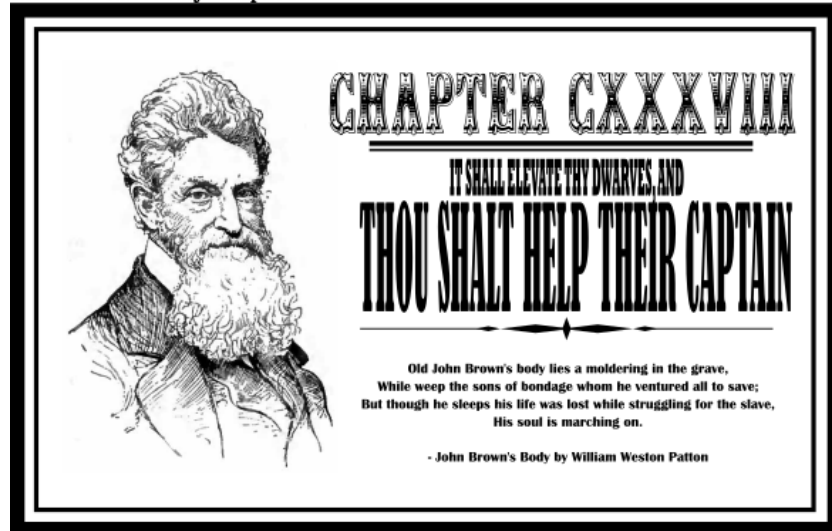
The ruckus had summoned the inmates over. Many of them believed that they had possibly started seeing mirages from starvation, but Tubman and co. were real. There wasn't much cheering from the tired, ragged crowd, except for a few falling to the ground to rest after realizing that they wouldn't have to labor longer for that day. Many of the cavalrymen dismounted, offering their rations to the inmates.

Tubman waited for the cavalrymen to go about their business and for the inmates to calm down, before she shouted "That's only the first camp for today. Be quick, people! We'll send some people over later to pick all these free men up, let them rest for now."

With that, Tubman and co. rode off, to end slavery in Karabush once and for all, and hopefully in all of Gemeinplatz soon enough when the time came.

Chapter 146: Chapter CXXXVIII – It shall elevate thy dwarves, and thou shalt help their captain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 138



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

17th of Spring 5860
Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

John Brown was busy as usual, back in the comfortable office of the former count. Casamonu, being situated between Libertycave and Karabush, was the perfect place for now to administrate the burgeoning republic. A burgeoning republic it was – complete with burgeoning piles of paperwork to sort through. The invention of the printing press was a catastrophe, at least for the poor sods who had to deal with paper.

For now, the paperwork was very simple – mostly letters sent to the Commander-in-Chief to inform him of what was happening. At least they were an indication that the mass literacy and education program was going well. Brown sat down, stretched his old bones a bit, and then got to work reading what was needed to be read. There wasn't any standardized spelling to the language of Gemeinplatz, and some new learners tended to invent some really creative spellings for words, so he had to read slowly and patiently to get what was written.

First off was a simple report, on how the slave liberations were going in Karabush. It had taken a few days for the Republic to locate where the camps had been set up, and then another few days to actually visit the camps and liberate the people within them. Then there were the newly freed arrivals, some of them who didn't even speak the Gemeinplatzish language, who had to be integrated into the Republic somehow. Thankfully, the freemen usually proved to be enthusiastic in their freedom. Most were happy to cultivate land when offered their own plot of land to own, or to make war against the Empire that enslaved them when offered a pike. Settlement into the towns, which there were three of now in the Republic, was discouraged since the food situation was dangerous.

The Republic needed more farmers, to mint more yeomen with the Homesteading Act, so that mass starvation wouldn't occur next year. Unlike the industrialized society that Brown came from, there weren't any fertilizers or machines to make agricultural work less labor-intensive. At most people

had draft animals to help drive their ploughs, or hand-tools to make things a bit easier, but those were nothing compared to what the 19th century on Earth had achieved. Gemeinplatz was still a pre-industrial society to its core, with the vast majority of the population being subsistence farmers who could barely produce more than what they consumed. Changing that wasn't exactly a priority right now, not when there was slavery to dismantle, so the boundless farms of Gemeinplatz were to remain for the foreseeable future.

Next up was a rough census, collected from old records, to be used for the 5860 General Elections. The Congress of Gemeinplatz had outgrown Casamonu and Libertycave, certainly now with Sir Inkwell and his associates being banned from holding office. Plus, the census would be pretty useful for the diminishing treasury of the Republic. The vast treasury of Karabush had relieved them a bit, but they couldn't maintain a war-based economy forever.

Therefore taxation (with representation) was the next step. First were income taxes. Income taxes in the United States (at a federal level) weren't a thing in Brown's lifetime, in fact they were implemented in 1861 to pay for the Civil War that followed his passing, but a progressive income tax was a thing in Britain and proposals had been made to implement such a system in the US federally. He'd have to get Rabanowicz to crunch some numbers to determine how much money would make sense to take in Gemeinplatz; Brown hadn't exactly gotten a chance to understand the value of the Gemeinplatz libra. Then there'd be a property tax, not that there was much taxable property in urban Gemeinplatz, but it was easy enough to record and collect.

Finally, a tax that had only become possible with the newly-manufactured printing presses, was an excise tax on alcohol and tobacco. Outside of Brown's obvious puritan intentions on limiting "excess", it would most likely prove a bountiful source of income considering how common alcohol was in Gemeinplatz. Such a tax was simple to implement: a seller of alcohol or tobacco would have to pay for and stick a government-issued stamp on any product that they sold. A bit of paper, a printing press, and some slime, and the Republic would have these up and running in no time.

Brown took a piece of paper, and quickly scratched himself a reminder to get together a few trusted people to set up an organization to enforce payment of taxes. It needed a catchy name like... Something that surveys, for the newly independent republic, the internal revenue that they make... The, the... The Independent Republic's Surveyors! John Brown felt a lightbulb light up in his head, except he didn't because he hadn't lived long enough to see incandescent lightbulbs, and he quickly jotted down the name of the organization.

Now was the last item on the agenda, quite the miniscule item: the dwarves. Their letter was, in dwarven fashion, etched on to a small stone slab. It was a simple request: for the Republic to focus on their dwarven allies and help liberate Aroghlie from elven occupation. "A meeting, with the Union of Dwarves-in-Exile." Brown slowly read, realizing that he had to change his plans for the day.

17th of Spring 5860

Union of Dwarves-in-Exile Hall, Libertycave

Brown stepped inside a hall, which upon second look he realized was in fact all carved stone. The chandelier at the top, the seats, the table, it was all just part of the mountain still. He couldn't help but admire the architecture, though right now he had other matters to deal with.

“Greetings, Miss Whitebeard.” Brown had to kneel down to extend a handshake to the dwarf who was sitting at the end of the table. The table was surrounded by dwarves, who were eyeing the Commander-in-Chief carefully.

“Glad to have you here, Sir- Mister Brown.” Whitebeard was always miffed by the fact that Brown seemed to eschew “noble” titles, but she wasn’t exactly in a position to negotiate for a higher title. The old man was weird, refusing to be called sir, or chief, or anything. If she was in his position, as a human with so many loyal subjects, she’d have crowned herself queen already. “You arrived here pretty quick.”

“Thanks to the new road, they’ve finished the one between Azdavay and Casamonu as well. I extend my gratitude for helping us with the engineering.” Brown sat down at an empty seat, though he had to shift around comfortably for a bit before realizing that it was futile. The seat was simply too small for him to sit comfortably.

Meanwhile, Whitebeard was walking around him, hands crossed behind her back, perhaps a bit nervous as her hand shook up and down. “If you’re here, then you’ve already heard of our request, and I won’t waste your time by trying to avoid the point. While we’ve extracted and saved many of our comrades from Aroghlie, who are all very grateful for your hospitality, we still wish to return to our home. The army of Leafblower is quite grand, and she doesn’t seem intent on leaving anytime soon, so...” She took a deep sigh, and then let go of a whole load of dwarven pride “...we’d like to request the help of the Republic, our allies.”

Brown paused, cleared his throat, and said what he had planned for a while now “I’ll be honest, I’m a man of the Lord, not a man of *Machiavellian* politics.”

“Maky... Maky- excuse me?”

“...it makes sense that word wouldn’t translate over. What I meant was that I quite dislike politicking. The Republic is, obviously, in a much superior position in this negotiation. It’d make sense for me to demand something in return, maybe some would see it as fair even, if I asked something in return for us sacrificing our lives for your people.”

The dwarves around looked much more nervous. Their eyes were on Brown, their hands on the desk, ready for a disapproving bang, and they knew they couldn’t do anything but disapprove. For all they knew, they were about to be subjugated and vassalized in exchange for returning home. Humans were scary, not because of their stature, but because of what was inside them.

Brown, in return, extended a smile “Lighten up, gentlemen – and, ladies. I’ll only ask you to join your Union with our union. Become a state, an equal part of the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz. This isn’t an ultimatum – I do think that the invasion of your home is unjust, and we’ll still end up clashing with the Imperials and liberating your home no matter what you say to my proposal.”

The dwarves around the table immediately relaxed, some took flasks out of their pockets to have a calming drink. Whitebeard voiced the question in everyone’s mind “In all honesty, why should we join the Republic then?”

“Because it’s beneficial for both parties, though if you accept, we’ll both be the same party. I’m sure you’ve taken note of how well your business has been faring for the dwarves in Libertycave. If you wish, you can isolate yourselves in your mountain as you have done for generations, you have the liberty to do that. However, as part of the Republic, you’ll have many trading opportunities, an army to protect you, and you’ll also get representation in the Congress as equal citizens. I’d say it’s

a much better deal than what you had with the Empire, with having to pay tariffs and taxes to countless lords just to get your goods delivered, without even receiving protection or representation in return.”

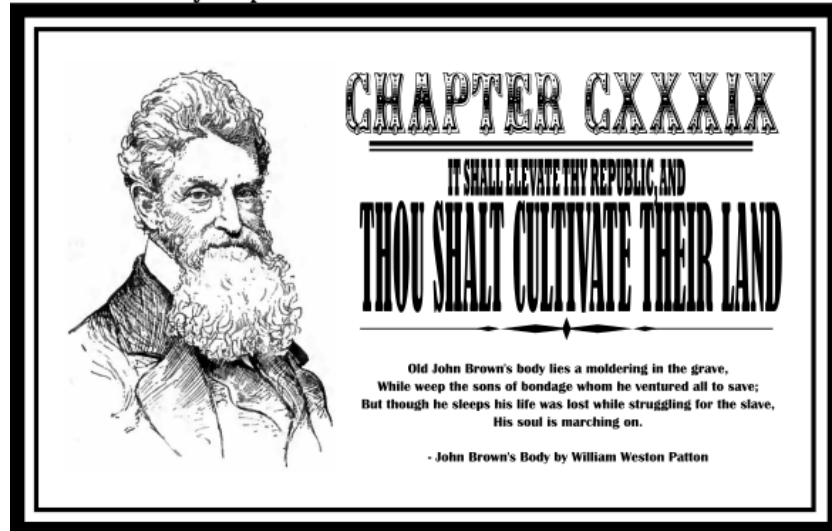
Brown’s eyes were drawn to the table itself, etched with intricate decorative details, true art carved just in stone. “The Republic needs diligent, crafty folk like you. I’m sure you can achieve much more when you have the entirety of Gemeinplatz as a canvas, and what we have already achieved in Libertycave is proof enough.”

Whitebeard looked around the room, to her fellow dwarves. At this moment, there was only one thing she could do “Raise your hands, all who are in favor of our Union joining the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz as its third state.”

On the 17th of Spring 5860, the Union of Dwarves, and Zon’guldac along with it, joined the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz as its third state.

Chapter 147: Chapter CXXXIX – It shall elevate thy republic, and thou shalt cultivate their land.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 139



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

19th of Spring 5860
Imperial Highway №04-030, State of Casamonu

It was a beautiful day down in Casamonu. The snow had completely melted, the birds were back and chirping, and there was a beautiful road for Rabanowicz to her horse on. She was accompanied by Watanabe who was clinging to her from the back, squeaking a little bit in fear every time he felt like he was about to fall off.

It had turned out that, for a man used to the conveniences of subways and buses, a horse was a beast of chaos. They went up, and down, sometimes let out a neigh, flopped their tails, and did whatever their animal mind pleased. Watanabe had his eyes closed tightly shut. His forehead was dripping with sweat despite there being a pleasant breeze. He was suddenly forced down back on to the Earth by Rabanowicz, who proudly plopped her boots on the road she had helped build. “Come on now, are you a newborn kitten shaking like that?” She nodded towards a village just to the side of the road “Time to do our job.”

“Right, right- oomph.” Watanabe was almost knocked out when Rabanowicz threw a stack of tablebooks on his arms to cradle. They had been stored in a satchel hanging by the horse’s saddle,

“Alright, the name of this place is...” Rabanowicz spotted a sign right outside the periphery of the village. “New Libertycave.”

Watanabe opened one of the tablebooks, cradling the rest with one arm with the tablebook open at the top of them, while holding a charcoal pencil with his other hand. He flipped to the relevant page and wrote down “New Libertycave... this is the ninth New Libertycave.”

“Hmm... Call it “New Libertycave-by...” Rabanowicz looked around for a significant landmark to note the name of the village down. She spotted a large oak tree nearby. “New Libertycave-by-Oak.”

Watanabe scribbled the new name down “Doctor, that is the second New Libertycave-by-Oak in record.”

“...New Libertycave-by-Oak-on-Thirty.”

Watanabe had to carefully minimize his letters to be able to fit the name before he hit the corner of the page. “New Libertycave-by-Oak-on-Thirty.”

“Exactly. New Libertycave, by an oak, on number thirty of the Imperial Highway. A descriptive name.” Rabanowicz took a look at the village from afar. It seemed pretty standard for a newly-built freemen village, and it definitely deserved to be called “New Libertycave”. The freemen who had moved out from Libertycave to the countryside had brought over the distinct style of Libertycave with them. A pile of drying clay bricks had been left by the roadside, right next to a brick building that looked newly-built. The village houses of course had copper rooves imported from Libertycave, colored orange as they hadn’t been exposed to the air long enough to become green. The houses had no glass windows, only wooden slits that had been opened for the spring. Around the houses was a large open area of tilled soil, with the newly-minted peasants already hard at work sowing crops. Rabanowicz made her way towards the village, hailing the first peasant saw “Good morning, sir, where is your mayor, headman, or whoever represents your village?”

The man in question paused, clearly unsure what to do, before he said something in a foreign language and ran off. “What’s his problem?” asked Watanabe.

“Let’s ask someone else. There has to be someone who can speak Gemeinplatzish.” Rabanowicz tried to talk to a few more people in the village, getting the same response every time.

After a while of asking around, to no avail, Rabanowicz and Watanabe leaned next to the walls of one of the houses to take a breath. “I think we’ll have to get a translator to talk to the people of this place” mused Rabanowicz, taking a mental note.

“That’d take way too long for just one village, to find someone who can speak both our languages.” Watanabe was thinking whether to leave, when he spotted a group approaching them. A large mob of peasants, led by quite a large man. “Uhh, maybe we should book it?”

“Don’t be a coward.” Rabanowicz walked towards the man in the front and gave him a wave “Good morning.”

“Good morning. Were you looking for me?” The man towered over Rabanowicz, a scar on his face, and he looked suspicious of the newcomers.

“Yes, I assume you’re the mayor of this place? We’ve been sent by the Commander-in-Chief to conduct a survey of villages around Casamonu.” Rabanowicz extended a signed paper from Brown, so did Watanabe. They held their papers forward awkwardly for a second before realizing that nobody in front of them could read.

“I haven’t been elected mayor or anything, but I do speak for the village. All the people here are new-arrivals to your realm, including me.” His expression softened up as he said something to the crowd, which made them disband. “They were worried that you may be men of the Imperials. Especially the otherworlder with you – otherworlders usually don’t bode well.”

“Apologies for being myself” replied Watanabe, the errant otherworlder.

“Would you like to take a seat?” The man took out a pair of stools out of the house which Rabanowicz and Watanabe had been leaning on. “My name is Mifele, nice to meet you.”

“And I am Doctor Rabanowicz, and he is Watanabe.”

“Watanabe *Haruhi!* The hero!”

“Everyone calls you Watanabe, you might as well not have a name, Monsieur Watanabe.”

“Hey-”

“So, what’s this about a survey?” Mifele had dragged himself a stool and joined in the sitting.

“A survey, and then a census. The Republic needs to know how much men we have, how much to tax, how much volunteers we can expect in the army, how many people will be voting... We need to know how many households you have here, plus how much land you’re cultivating for this season.” Rabanowicz and Watanabe had only been assigned to Casamonu thankfully – there were other people doing the same job as them over in Karabush. “So, if you’ll allow us...”

“Of course, that’s the least we can do to help you people.” Mifele proceeded to get up, and lead Rabanowicz and Watanabe throughout the village. Watanabe was tasked with counting every house they passed, adding up to get a number of households in the village, while Rabanowicz was busy measuring the fields with some rope and stakes. She’d later use these numbers to calculate how much, on average, one peasant produced in Gemeinplatz for taxation and mobilization purposes.

The peasants were watching Rabanowicz do her work. From the outside, with how esoteric the science of statistics was, it wouldn’t be wrong to say that she was doing black magic in front of their eyes. Rabanowicz almost bumped onto an onlooker, and as she reeled back she asked the mayor “Could you ask them to leave me alone for a second? It’s distracting me from my work.”

“Of course.” Mifele clapped and shouted some words, which caused the crowd to disperse.

“They’re getting adapted to life in the boonies as well, with all that staring at awe at a city-dweller.”

Rabanowicz continued laying out a piece of work, conversing while working “Where are you from, Monsieur Mifele? I assume you’ve been in Gemeinplatz for a while.”

“No, I have only been in your realm for... two or three seasons at most. Time in captivity passes by quickly, it’s hard to tell, and the seasons here are very different.”

“You speak Gemeinplatzish very well” replied Rabanowicz. She drove a stake into the ground, to hold the rope tight. “Were you a trader? A diplomat? A scholar?”

Mifele spoke slowly and somberly “I used to be the captain of the royal guard of a king down in Ginye. The lords of my realm train young slaves, my family sold me before I could even remember them, to be loyal soldiers and officers of state. You’re right about me being a diplomat – I’d often accompany my lord with his court, and it’s pretty useful to be able to communicate with Gemeinplatzish merchants when you encounter them.”

“A pretty bad fall from grace, then.” Rabanowicz dug another stake on the ground, completing two corners of a triangle. “What happened?”

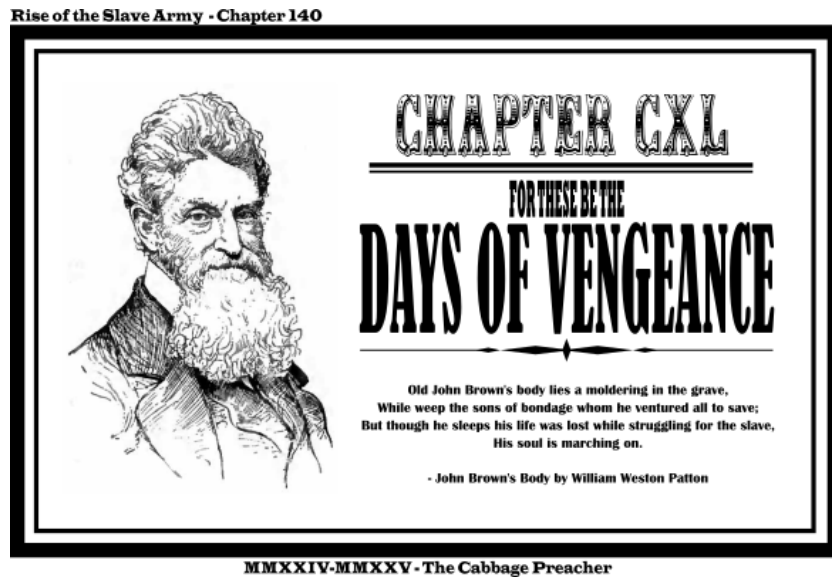
“My lord was a gracious man, maybe too gracious, and by the time he noticed a plot to overthrow him it was too late. I got sold off to a slaver caravan as part of the spoils of war captured by the rebel lords.” He let out a painful chuckle “The lightskins in Gemeinplatz are fools, to use their slaves so inefficiently. They have so many men they rule over, yet all they can make them do is dumb labor.”

“Right? A total waste of men.” Rabanowicz completed the triangle with her last stake. The farm plots were square, but she could easily calculate the area of a square plot of land by multiplying the two sides of her triangle together, and then multiplying it by two. It saved a bit of rope, which she had marked regular sections of to use as a flexible ruler. She quickly concluded her head math, and jotted down the area on a small tablebook in her pocket. “That’s the last field, right?”

“Indeed, it is.” Mifele helped Rabanowicz coil her rope back up, and soon she had a bundle of rope and a job well-done on her hand.

“Good day to you then. Good luck with your village, Monsieur Mifele.” Rabanowicz waved goodbye, and made her way to collect Watanabe for the next village on the road.

Chapter 148: Chapter CXL – For these be the days of vengeance.



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

27th of Spring 5860
Castle Casamonu, Casamonu

It was a cramped day in John Brown's office in Castle Casamonu. Rabanowicz and Watanabe had moved in temporarily, to do their job in crunching numbers. Rabanowicz was reading through the tablebooks full of data, while Watanabe had borrowed the big writing slate from the school to write his calculations on. Constantly the chalk scratched on the slate, creating quite the grating noise. Today however, something different happened: Watanabe stopped. Their job was done. It was only a rough calculation, based on the number of households rather than counting individual people, but it was accurate enough for the time being.

The errant otherworlder slowly read out what was on the board, proud of a job well-done "Nineteen thousand people in the State of Casamonu. One and a half thousand in Libertycave, plus five hundred dwarven refugees, five hundred in Casamonu. Twelve thousand people in the State of Karabush. Six hundred of them in the urban center of Karabush. Huh. I could have sworn Libertycave had more people the last time we checked. Did we count something wrong?"

Rabanowicz immediately had an answer "Most of the people in Libertycave moved to the countryside, that's the reason. I don't think maintaining three thousand in one place would have been possible." The Homesteading Act had certainly helped people find a reason to want to move out from the cramped mountaintop.

"I knew that the towns here looked small, but, wow. The office building I worked at probably had more people than Casamonu and Karabush." Certainly, taking a look at the view from outside the window, Watanabe could see the end of Casamonu's borders pretty easily. Granted, most buildings being one or two stories tall did add some width, but it still felt miniscule to his modern urban environment. He could see one or two buildings which had already crumbled, and many more which looked abandoned. Casamonu felt like it had died. "Maybe we should ask the old man to set up office in Libertycave instead. This place creeps me out. I wouldn't be surprised if there are ghosts lurking around."

“Ghosts of the past, perhaps.” Rabanowicz jokingly knocked on the door to the office. “Are you there?”

The door opened.

“What the f-” Watanabe stopped himself from swearing upon noticing that it was John Brown. He wasn’t willing to withstand another long lecture about common decency. “G-good morning, captain.”

“Good morning, Mister Brown.”

“Good morning to you, Mister Watanabe and Doctor Rabanowicz... why are you so pale? You two look like you’ve seen a ghost.”

“We... haven’t.” Watanabe took a deep breath, calmed down, and patted his slate board. “The numbers. Libertycave is way larger than Casamonu, so we should probably move your office back there now that the war with Karabush has concluded. It seems most people didn’t return to here. The Homesteading Act was a success, considering that most of the population has returned to the countryside.” Watanabe felt awkward giving a presentation without a pointer and remote in his hand. He had to hold himself from stating “next slide” as he finished talking about all that was on the slate.

Brown nodded “We don’t have much to move to Libertycave anyways, so we can set off back to Libertycave today. I’ll let the newly-elected mayor of Casamonu take over the office here.”

28th of Spring 5860 **Libertycave, Libertycave**

News had spread: “The captain is coming!”

An impromptu procession had gathered around Brown. He wasn’t all too pleased; large processions weren’t the sort of thing that he thought democratic leaders ought to do. He shooed away his admirers as politely as he could, shouting “Ladies, gentlemen, please get back to your day-to-day!” while riding his horse through the crowd. Sure, being appreciated and admired felt nice, but Brown also knew that self-conceit to be a sin that could easily lead to a man’s downfall. He thought of it better to be a Washington than a Caesar, and even then, he himself would rather not do something as arrogant as compare himself to either of those great men.

Not getting any grandiose gestures of rulership from the old man, the crowd eventually got bored and disappeared. Brown took a deep sigh of relief, thinking of himself free from the fancifulness of monarchs. However, when he approached the door of his cozy cave office, the liberty cave of Libertycave, he found a small contingent parked right next to his office. Emphasis on small – it was the dwarves, who looked much more militarized. A dwarf in the front carried the banner of the Republic, holding it as high as it could (which wasn’t too high). Their weapons looked to be mostly hand-me-down copper spears, along with a few who carried warhammers. Their uniforms were the blue of the Republic, and outside of a difference in height, they looked the part.

“Commander-in-chief!” Whitebeard saluted Brown “We’re ready to take back Zon’guldac on your command!”

There couldn't have been more than one or two hundred dwarves gathered. That was far from a regiment. Nor did Brown exactly have a plan for how to utilize dwarves in the military. He'd get some ideas from the dwarves... if the dwarves knew anything about military affairs. Brown had tried to consult them when they first arrived, but the dwarves hadn't seen war since time unknown. It was a mythological, hypothetical matter to them, not a matter of life and death, tactics and strategy, luck and sheer luck.

Whitebeard approached Brown. Her warhammer was positioned just right to smash Brown's kneecap in if she wanted to. "I gathered whoever was able and willing to fight, captain."

Kneecaps... Kneecaps... "Kneecaps!" shouted Brown suddenly. "You're perfect for the pike line!"

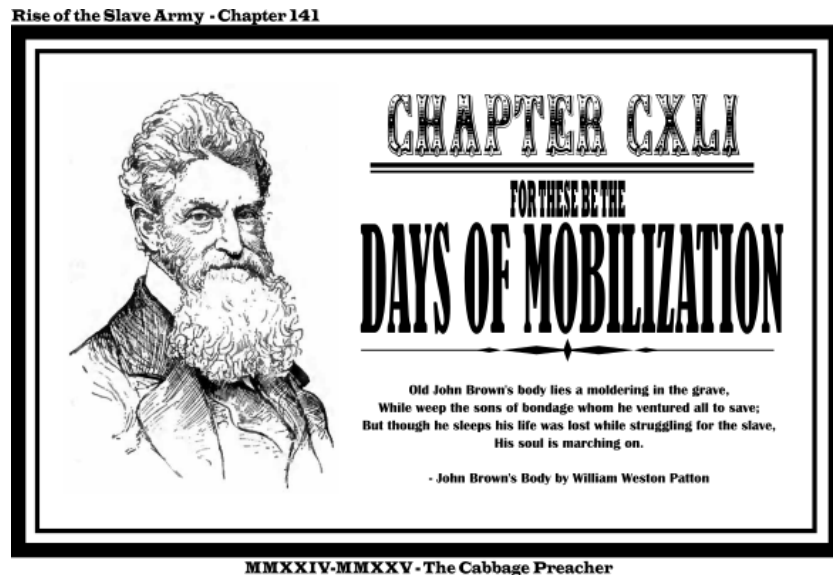
"E-excuse me?"

Brown already had the idea. Dwarves to walk under the line of pikes, attacking the enemy. "I'll get the other captains to distribute you amongst our regiments... There should be some space open once we collect a regiment in Karabush and transfer some veterans from other regiments there.

"W-what about Aroghlie and Zon'guldac?"

Brown opened the door and shouted "I have plans!" before shutting the door down with a bang.

Chapter 149: Chapter CXLI – For these be the days of mobilization.



30th of Spring 5860
Karabush, State of Karabush

Today was a quiet morning in Karabush. Following the brief yet chaotic and gruesome battle, the silence was a welcome change. The sun rose up over the walls of the town, sunlight seeping through the curtains of the citizenry. Another quiet day was about begin-

BANG-BANG-BANG! TRA-RA-RAP-RAP, BANG!

Or, a procession of men would enter through the gates of the city. The men in the front were uniformed with the blue of the Army of the Republic, and one of them were holding a flag of the Republic. The blue-white-green had quickly become familiar to the citizens of Karabush, though nobody was quite willing to fly it themselves yet. The flag raised on the mayor's building, the original that had been raised there during the Battle Karabush, had a third star crudely tailored on it to denote the newly-admitted state of Zon'guldac.

BANG-BANG-BANG! TRA-RA-RAP-RAP, BANG!

The professional troops were followed by a much larger procession of peasants, who had been newly recruited from the villages of Karabush. Today they were to find a place in the abandoned barracks of Karabush, and wait for uniforms and arms to arrive from the capital in Casamonu. Most of them would be recruited into the newly-formed 5th Infantry Regiment (of Karabush), while the rest would be used to form a National Guard unit in Karabush to garrison the state and undertake infrastructure projects (like upgrading the Imperial Highway between Casamonu and Karabush to macadam).

BANG-BANG-BANG! TRA-RA-RAP-RAP, BANG.

The regiment stopped in the town square, where an official proceeded to lead the peasants to their new home in the town's barracks. There certainly wasn't enough space in the town to house a regiment of a thousand people, that was double the population of Karabush, but it was enough as a

temporary place to stay before a suitable castle near Karabush could be captured for military housing purposes. The soldiers left behind in the town square got to work setting up a stand to promote recruitment for the national guard. They were aided by propaganda posters, printed by the printworks in Libertycave, which had illustrations of a vague Imperial miasma descending upon the idyllic Republic alongside other similar depictions soliciting enlistment from the citizens.

The National Guard was quite the lucrative offer – regular payment for work when mobilized, with the members only being obliged to join drills when not mobilized. For the peasantry it was a good way to make money in the off-season when their agricultural work was done, for the citizens it wasn't much different from the city garrisons that they had been part of. Similarly, for the army, it wasn't as rigid as a modern professional army. The peasantry were allowed to return home to tend to their fields once their basic training was done, in exchange for receiving lesser pay during their absence. The Commander-in-Chief Brown wasn't exactly fond of career soldiers, he had first encountered soldiery in his youth during the War of 1812 and found them to be crude and immoral. The pay for the Army of the Republic wasn't too high, only enough to cover the basic needs of its soldiers, to avoid it being lucrative as a profession. Most of its members were composed of freed slaves who wanted to fight to not get captured again by the Empire, or peasants who had gotten land from the Homesteading Act who wanted to make sure that the Empire wouldn't come back to feudalize their land. The National Guard was basically a glorified state-employed construction company with arms, so Brown saw no problem in giving them pay for their non-combat labor. Ideally, when the war against slavery was done, the Army of the Republic would demobilize while the National Guard would be expanded to take over the defense of the states. For now however, Brown needed overwhelming offense rather than defense.

As the sun set once more on Karabush, the National Guard had four dozen new members from the town, and the Fifth Infantry Regiment had set up camp for the night. Tomorrow they'd get to learning how to march in formation, taking their first step forward defending the Republic and defeating the Empire.

31st of Spring 5860

Libertycave, State of Casamonu

While the Fifth Infantry Regiment in Karabush started their drill, the dwarf-made Fourth Infantry Regiment (ostensibly of Zon'guldac) had started its own. Libertycave had its own town square now, constructed in front of the cave that was at the center of the town, and it was also suitable flat ground for army drills.

Brown and Ayomide were supervising their miniscule comrades-in-arms, though in actuality the majority of the regiment had been filled in by human peasants and freemen from Casamonu. Human pikemen, relatively tall by themselves, looked even more tall and intimidating with the weapon they held. Right under the line of pikes were the dwarves who, with their warhammers, were ready to sneak under the line of pikes and be deployed to smash the enemy's kneecaps. The difficulty in this formation came from the humans trying not to trip on the dwarves, which'd be quite disruptive to a tight pike formation.

“March!”

The pikemen deployed into long columns each three men wide, with the dwarves being in the middle of the column. For a normal pike formation, it'd be three-people wide sans dwarves.

“Ready!”

The marching column dissolved itself into a pike square 30 men deep, with dwarves dispersed between the men for deployment. In the middle of this rectangle were their officers, flag bearer and drummers helping keep the square organized. It was pretty hard to march with so many men in front of each other, which is why they marched “Forward!” at a slug’s pace despite their training. Despite the sluggishness however, an organized pike square simply could not be beat by melee infantry and cavalry. Things could get ugly if somebody managed to land a cannon shot through such a deep formation though, which Brown relied on the abysmal accuracy of the primitive Gemeinplatzish artillery to not let that happen.

Ayomide, quite impressed with the performance, had a question for the Commander-in-Chief when she took a break from commanding the troops “So, when are we marching on to Zon’guldac?”

“Patience, young lady. We’ll set off when the training of the regiment over in Karabush is complete. I would not be surprised if the lords east and west of Karabush were getting ready to attack us. There are two big towns which Karabush sits in between: Changra and Bolipoli. Even if they are not planning an attack right now, they’ll most likely make a move when our attention and resources are focus towards Zon’guldac.”

“So, the guys over at Karabush will be there to delay them and force them into a siege.”

“Exactly, young lady. From Zon’guldac we’ll go further east to capture the seat of the elven chief in Periligoul. That’s pretty close to Bolipoli, and they’ll either have to break the siege in Karabush to defend it, or they’ll be caught unaware and we’ll capture Bolipoli in no time. Either is a good outcome... as long as we act swiftly. Tubman says that the elves do not have any sort of allies stationed around their settlements, but their domain is close to the Imperial capital. The Imperials would be able to send reinforcements quickly if they felt themselves threatened by our approach, therefore, we shouldn’t give them any time to even consider sending anything before we are done.”

Ayomide watched the regiment resting in the town square, the locals offering them refreshments. One regiment; a thousand people. Only recently had she gotten used to seeing so many people gathered, and the Republic had four more of such regiments. Soon she would be marching along four thousand. Four thousand. “We have a lot of people, don’t we.”

Brown laughed “Believe me, your jaw would drop if you saw the armies of *Britain* or *France*.”

Ayomide could guess that he just said the names of otherworldly polities “How large were their armies?”

“Hundreds of thousands. Perhaps even a million.”

“A... how big is a ‘million’?” Ayomide thought that the old man must be messing with her now.

“A thousand thousands.” Brown extended his arms out in an attempt to explain such multitudes. Ayomide stared back, being unable to imagine such great numbers of people in one place, but she still looked impressed with her mouth remaining open in amazement. Brown relaxed his arms and returned to looking like a sane person “But, truth be told, those numbers don’t mean anything, do they? We have four thousand men here, and they have committed countless times more good than the *British* army will ever commit.”

“Uh, yeah. We’re the best, old man.”

“The Lord above will judge what we are. Hopefully we’ll be judged better than the *British*.”

Chapter 150: Interlude – A proper gander.

The New Inkwell Printworks: A place of culture and literature.

In practice...

“Watanabe, this is the third time today where you have drawn vague Imperial miasma!” It was Rabanowicz, scribbling slogans on a paper while Watanabe was sketching on another.

“Come on, it’s a good visual metaphor! You have the black miasma, going *whoosh* and *swoosh* over the Republic, it’s supposed to be scary!”

“Yes, but you’re going to bore people if you draw the same thing over and over again.” Rabanowicz let out a sigh “Did you not have such posters back where you came from?”

“Well, yeah, but those were mostly advertisement.” Even then, Watanabe didn’t remember seeing much posters. Advertisement and propaganda had moved on to the big screen, then the small screen, a reflection of how 21st century men had become like slop-guzzling swine.

“Make it like an advertisement then. Just take inspiration from what you know.” Rabanowicz returned to the desk, while Watanabe had gears turning in his mind. What he knew... he knew of one effective way of propaganda, a method so powerful it had won elections and caused humanity to be set back decades on Earth.

First, he drew a very side-profile. A very simple one that could be replicated by even a child. A very prominent chin, a magnificent mustache, and luscious locks of hair. In contrast to him, he drew another figure. A very simple portrait of a man, crying with a grotesque impression. He wrote a caption under the crying guy: “noo you cant barge into my mansion just to burn it down and free my slave harem!” Under the good-looking chap, a different caption: “Face the justice of the Republic slaver.” He added a gun to the Republic soldier, misshapen for comedic effect.

“Look, look.” Watanabe poked Rabanowicz by the shoulder, giggling at his stupid little image.

Rabanowicz looked at him like he was insane, but as she looked closer... “Pfft.” She couldn’t help but giggle either. The intentional misspelling. The crude, childish, cartoonish depictions of the two figures. The misshapen rifle. It was all so ridiculous, so stupid, that it wrapped back around to being funny somehow. “Did you live with a primitive tribe? What sort of style is that?” She couldn’t deny it was effective though.

“The style of the *Internet* people.”

“The *Internetim*...”

Watanabe set aside what he drew, and got to work on another equally dumb idea. He started with a very crude drawing of John Brown from memory. It looked really, really crappy, but it was recognizably Brown, and he was pointing towards the viewer. In a very bold style, reminiscent of Impact font on Earth, Watanabe wrote “SLAVERY TIME” at the top, and “IS OVER” at the bottom.

“SLAVERY TIME.” Rabanowicz’s eyes travelled down “IS OVER.” It was nonsensical. It was absurd. It didn’t have a deep message, eloquent prose, or a striking image. It was propaganda at its highest, or lowest, form.

Another idea. Another crude sketch, that of a farmer, in a paddy. Watanabe realized that there was no rice grown in Gemeinplatz, but whatever. A paddy was close enough to a field of crops to be recognizable. He left white space at the top, and wrote down his caption “me and the boys when my application for homesteading land is accepted” Then, he added a subtitle to the image, with the farmer shouting “WELCOME TO THE WHEATFIELDS MOTHERF-“ Watanabe realized that a swearword would never fly with the captain. He erased it and wrote “WELCOME TO THE WHEATFIELDS, KIDS” as a subtitle. It was significantly less funny without the swearing, but he had to make do.

“This is so stupid...” said Rabanowicz, stifling her laughter.

“This is the part where it gets better.” Watanabe took the image from before, of Brown pointing towards the screen. Then he added an alternate caption to it. “Friend, what’s missing from our _nit? U!” with a small little “Apply to join the Army of the Republic today!” to do its business. “You see, you can just use the same image and print it with different captions. The more widespread an image is, the more varied captions it gets, the funnier and memorable it will become.”

“*Adohe*... this is so, *so* imbecilic. An insult to art and literature both.” However, Rabanowicz took the first image. Pondering, thinking, she found another caption. “nooooo you cant just give free education to the commoners” replied with “Literacy is the right of all freemen.” She then added a little blurb at the bottom encouraging citizens to join the elementary schools. Rabanowicz proudly presented her sick meme to Watanabe, who nodded in approval. He had just taught a pre-industrial woman in her mid-30s how to make a meme, and he was dang proud of it.

“How are things going?” Azra Inkwell entered the room, to check up on how her helpers were progressing. She picked up a paper with the crappy little doodle of John Brown on it. Clearly, she found it humorous, considering she immediately began laughing, almost dropping the paper. “Oh, by the Divine, this looks... so stupid.”

“It *is* stupid, isn’t it? Stupid...” Rabanowicz giggled however upon reminiscing of the caricature of Brown on that paper. Seeing the old man, always so serious and well-kept, be drawn so lackadaisically... She was afraid that he might be offended by it, but knowing the captain he’d either be indifferent or he’d find it funny.

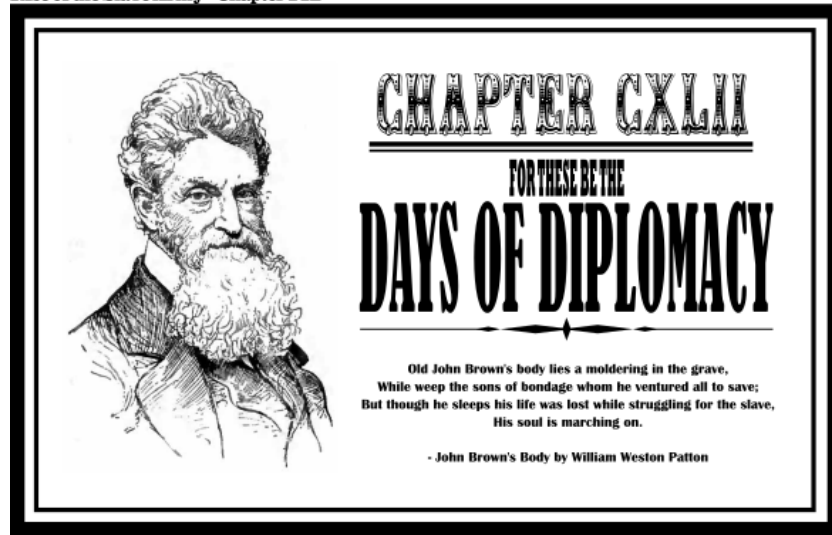
Watanabe gave a little explanation to Azra “The thing with these simple images is that they can be captioned with anything. You’ll only need to make one copy of that image, and then you can use whatever is in your typecase to caption it differently.” He pointed out the alternative captions for the Brown image on the paper.

“Oh goodness... I will get someone to carve this onto a woodblock as soon as possible.” Azra herself had already found ideas on what to caption this one image with. Some propagandistic, some purely absurd and humorous. She left the room, leaving Watanabe and Rabanowicz to spawn more stupid little ideas.

A little while later, Watanabe would present the image of Brown to the man himself. He’d agree with a “this looks stupid”, laugh, and then give permission for his crudely drawn visage to be printed.

Chapter 151: Chapter CXLII – For these be the days of diplomacy.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 142



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

37th of Spring 5860
Karabush, State of Karabush

“Ready!”

Another morning, another round of drills for the 5th Infantry Regiment led by General Tubman. It had only been a week, but with their spiffing uniforms and shiny pikes, they were beginning to look quite like something. Their formation wasn’t perfect, the square they formed looked way off in particular with many men jutting out. Still, it was more bodies to throw at a problem, and most problems could be solved with enough bodies.

“You’re all dismissed for a break!” The drills were done... or so it seemed. The next part was the most crucial part of army life: setting up for lunch. From the horses and donkeys food was unloaded by the soldiery. It consisted mostly of hardtack and a new arrival: pemmican. A calorie-rich mix of dried meat, dried fruit, and fat that could last for years without need for refrigeration. On Earth it had been a staple of the natives of the Americas, and Brown had brought it over to Gemeinplatz. Outside of the food provided by the Republic, the soldiery were permitted to bring over and carry in their bags whatever they pleased, and they were encouraged to forage on the way for anything edible.

Some of the more tired soldiers went only for the hardtack-pemmican combo, eating pemmican between hardtack like a sandwich. Firewood was gathered, and fires set up by those who intended to cook their food. Wheat porridge, with pemmican plus wild onions and herbs, was one of the more popular dishes in the camp. Most had invested their foraging time into acquiring tilia flowers for tilia tea. The pots and cups were provided by the soldiers themselves of course, always carried ready-for-use in their bags. Their copper helmets functioned as bowls too. Tubman herself got a pemmican-hardtack sandwich snack. She sat on a tree stump, eating while getting a rare chance to rest.

Suddenly, there was commotion in the camp. Tubman reluctantly got off her comfy seat and headed to where the most noise was coming from. People were pointing at a trio of noble-looking men on

horsemen plus their dozen retainers. They were carrying flags that were not of the Republic: one banner with a castle surrounded by wheat, another with a great big pine, and the last one had a great temple depicted on it. One of the men looked to be a priest, while the other two looked more like typical aristocrats. The priest at the front was shouting “Where is your leader?”

Tubman surfed through the crowd and shouted back “Here I am: General Harriet Tubman.”

The priest looked at Tubman with curiosity and confusion. “Take us to your master.”

“The only master I recognize is up above,” Tubman pointed up to the heavens where the Heavenly Father presumably resided “I will be glad to help you on your journey if you wish to be taken to Him posthaste.” She patted the flintlock pistol which was hanging by her waist. The diplomats couldn’t exactly decipher that the flintlock pistol was a firearm; they assumed that it must be a magic wand and that she must be threatening them nonetheless. Tubman continued “All the men you see here, including me, are free men as the Lord made them. You are to speak to me.”

“So it is true” mused one of the aristocrats. He looked at the men around him as if they were exotic animals on display “I can’t believe it. Darkskins ruling their own. How queer.”

Tubman was starting to consider whether to send these men on an express ticket to meeting Jesus Christ “Why are you here then, to gawk?”

“No, no.” The priest suddenly remembered he was on official business “We are here on the behalf of our lords: the Most Eminent High Priest of Ancoire, and the Mayors of Changra and Bolipoli. They extend to you an offer of amnesty as approved by the Chancellor. Slavery has been abolished in the Empire, so you have no more reason to rebel. If you lay down your weapons now, you’ll be given work and lodging in the work camps. Otherwise, we have forty thousand men at the ready to restore order in the provinces you have occupied.

Forty thousand. That number hit Tubman like a truck. She did for a second consider whether the men were bluffing, but then she remembered Vaiz talk about Ancoire. As a priest he had travelled there for his education, and it was said to be the largest city after the Imperial capital. Forty thousand men didn’t seem too far of a stretch for the seat of the Empire’s state religion. She didn’t know exactly how the Temple of the Divine worked, but if it was anything like the Catholic Church on Earth, they must have been loaded. Loaded with money and skeletons in their closet, that is. No matter how many men they faced however, Tubman had one answer: “I know the answer I’d give, I know the answer that Captain Brown would give, and that’d be a clear *no*.”

The priest was clearly shocked “N-no? I am talking about forty thousand men. Not four thousand. Forty thousand. *Forty!*”

“A hundred of your finest men would barely equal to one of our free men in spirit and courage. We have Providence with us, what do you have?”

“The Divine’s will? The approval of the Most Eminent?”

“Maybe ask yourself if this Divine of yours would approve of having your fellow man in chains.” Tubman had a cheeky grin on her old face as she said the next line “We are the Divine’s will, your due divine punishment for your sins.”

“Wha-” Telling that sort of disparaging truth to a priest was punishable with being burnt on a stake. Tubman had said it so calmly, a matter of fact, with a grin that made him frustrated. Not to mention

that she was much darker than him! The priest drew his sword and intended to ride forward, before a line of pikes blocked his way to the General. His horse refused to ride further when it'd be skewered by sharp steel. All he could do was watch as this old woman taunted him with her demeanor.

“Now, return to where you came from and tell your lords that we are ready for a fight. Unless they sober up and surrender of course, but that'll be when pigs fly.”

One of the soldiers next to her chimed in “General, pigs have wings. They *can* fly.” The rest of the crowd was equally puzzled by her expression.

Tubman suddenly realized that she had never seen a pig in Gemeinplatz. Nor had she had pork ever since she came here. She asked an honest question to the priest “Do you not eat pigs?”

“No, it's not suitable food for people. It's forbidden. I have seen pigs be cultivated and eaten by tribes outside of the empire's borders, and they do have wings. I thought that was common knowledge?” For a second the confusion had made even him forget that he was about to declare war on all the people in front of him.

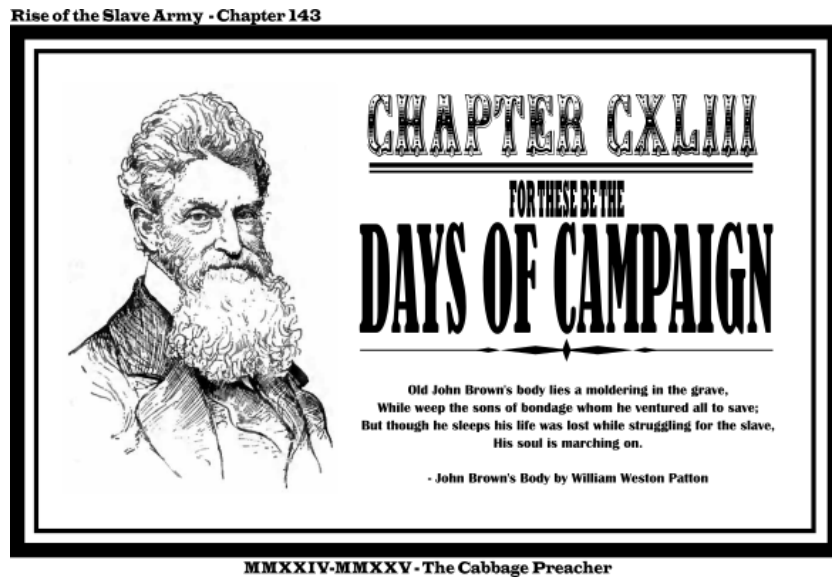
“Huh. They don't have wings where I come from.” Everyone had gone silent. It was an awkward moment for all involved. “Ahem. What I meant is, we'll never accept your terms.”

“Understood. It is a shame that we have to shed blood. Goodbye.” The diplomats turned their horses around, and left the scene. Now there truly was an uneasy quiet.

Forty thousand.

Tubman could only shout “Back to drilling!”

Chapter 152: Chapter CXLIII – For these be the days of campaign.



41st of Spring 5860 Imperial Highway №04-030, March of Zon'guldac

The stars had come out for the night, and the Army of the Republic had pitched its tents around the half-finished Casamonu-Zon'guldac highway. Tomorrow, they'd arrive at Aroghlie, the city of the dwarves.

Brown was taking a breath of fresh air right next to his tent, which sat at the center. It was night, yet the area was lit bright by the campfires of four thousand souls, plus the uncounted camp followers who were following them. Compared to Casamonu the area was quite flat, though it was equally populated by a dense forest of trees. Quite the scary place to be if one wasn't surrounded by an army. A few weaponnappers had come popping out on the way, only to be scared off by the giant mass of people and burrowing themselves back.

Suddenly, Brown noticed Vaiz the priest running towards him. Before he could even wave hello, the priest shouted "Mister Brown! Horrible news!" He had been stationed along with the army since having someone who had visited these lands before helped.

Brown simply replied "Tell me the news first so that I can evaluate myself whether it's horrible or not."

"A messenger on horseback just ran up to me and... and there's forth thousand men coming to attack us from Ancoire, Changra and Bolipoli! What do we do?!"

"First, we take a deep breath and calm down, young man." Brown waited for Vaiz to do so before speaking further "Now, what do you know about our new enemies?"

"*Huff...* Changra and Bolipoli are relatively small cities, but Ancoire is where the High Priesthood is located. His Eminency's wealth is bountiful and Ancoire populous. I'd certainly believe that they could have raised forty thousand men together if they wanted to. The city of Ancoire itself is only second to the capital in terms of size."

“I see.” responded Brown calmly.

“Y-you see?”

“We have five thousand men, who I’d say are the best equipped and trained in this realm, not to mention best supplied. I don’t know how they’re equipped, but I’ve got trust in the Republic’s men.”

“I-I see.” Vaiz didn’t know what he had expected, but he wasn’t surprised that the old man didn’t think of surrender for a second. “Do you have any orders you’d like me to relay back to that messenger?”

“Tell General Tubman to hold steadfast and delay the enemy as much as she can. Don’t bother defending the weak walls of Karabush; retreat to Casamonu and prepare for another siege. We will make our return once the elven chief is defeated. Oh, and-”

Before Brown could finish speaking, there was shouting from outside the camp. A commotion that lasted for a brief moment before it seemed to quiet down. “Oh, and, we’ll speak later.” Ayomide was running towards him.

Ayomide spoke very quickly and laconically “The elves just shot at us. A bunch of our men are injured. We don’t know where they are firing from.”

“Quite clever.” Brown thought about sending the cavalry to patrol, but horses usually didn’t mingle well with dense forests. “We’d probably have to burn the entire forest down if we wanted to reveal where they’re hiding.”

“Would you like use to burn the forest, old man?” asked Ayomide without a hint of sarcasm in her voice.

Brown sounded offended “Of course not, young lady! Why would we burn the forest we’re currently residing in? Not to mention that it’d be a slight against the Lord to needlessly tarnish what He has put on this earth!” He took a deep breath and calmed down “Just, make sure to be extra careful with your patrols. They’ll probably keep harassing us throughout the night.”

“Okay, old man.” Ayomide left the premises to go do her thing as a revolutionary catgirl wizard.

“I’ve heard this is why the elves have always stayed separate from the Empire: they’re quite troublesome. Apparently, no army has been able to enter their forests and stay intact. I personally observed how sharp their shooting was during my time with them.” Vaiz looked at Brown, trying to see if the old man had any sort of expression of worry on his face. He didn’t.

“Which is why I don’t plan on adding the elven lands to the Republic. Not yet anyways, until they are ready and willing. We’d either have to commit an atrocity and wipe them and their forest out, or we’d have to watch ourselves go through countless nights like this while they grind us down. We’ll depose their chief, and then leave as swiftly as we entered.”

“Hopefully it’s as simple as that.” Just thinking of reentering the forest as an enemy hostile to the elves made Vaiz shudder in fear. “These elves have been unruly and uncivilized since time immemorial.”

Brown furrowed his brow and replied with genuine anger “They’re all sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father. They’re no more or less savage than the city-dwelling blueblood slavemongers. The only difference is that one of them is more soft-spoken, and therefore *seems* more agreeable and civilized to you.”

“A-apologies, Mister Brown.” Vaiz awkwardly apologized, and then silently left Brown’s side to avoid further talk of this topic.

Brown heaved a deep sigh “Oh, there is so much to teach to these people...”

42nd of Spring 5860 Imperial Highway №04-030, March of Zon’guldac

The Army of the Republic had woken up early in the morning, and by the evening they had begun seeing signs of life. On the perimeter of Aroghlie there weren’t as much farmland as one might expect from a standard human settlement; most dwarven farming was done underground. There had been a few human villages along the outskirts of Aroghlie, but those had mostly been abandoned after the elves came to visit. For now it was eerily quiet, with empty, unsown fields scattered here and there. In the distance there seemed to be a hastily erected slate obelisk for “Captain Blackbeard, lost her life in these premises on 16th of Autumn 5859 in battle with the elven invader.”

“Rest in peace, the poor woman. I remember having a drink with her once” commented Lady Whitebeard. She was among the dwarves who had been dispersed into the human pikemen as reinforcements, acting as an officer. A few of the dwarves expressed similar condolences as well towards their late comrade.

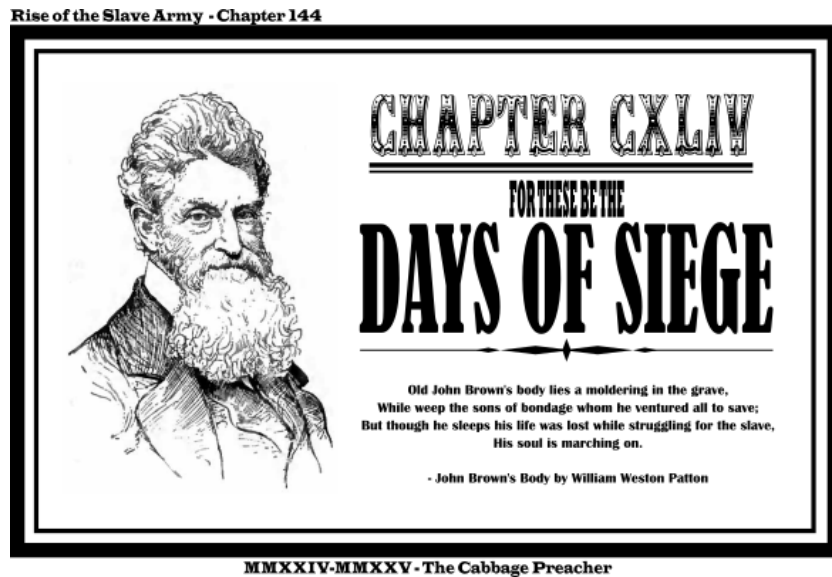
As they got closer, the familiar slate walls of the city began towering over them. They had been repaired since the siege. Now that they were maintained, the walls probably had some structural integrity to them. The Republic had acquired a few cannons from the arsenal of Karabush, and they had brought them along for the siege, but they were mostly small-caliber and probably not enough to knock down the walls by themselves. Still, they had been brought over along with a couple of siege engineers hired from Karabush. No harm done by pounding the walls a bit.

On the walls the elves could clearly be seen from the shine reflecting from their bronze helmets. Not to mention that their lanky figures peeked way beyond the dwarf-sized defenses. Brown rode forward towards the wall, with a new invention in sight. It was a conic device, with holes on both sides, for enhancing sound. A megaphone, not an electronic one, but even an old-fashioned megaphone made things much louder “This is Commander-in-Chief John Brown of the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz speaking! Surrender now, and you shall be spared and treated justly! What you do right now is a slight against all that is good and fair!”

Brown couldn’t hear it, but the elves on the walls were chuckling at his remarks. “To the dwarves still inside the city, we implore you to sabotage your oppressors and aid us as much as possible! As your allies, we are here to aid you, and you will regain your freedom as equals with us once this siege is over! We have your brother and sister dwarves here with us in our army!”

Seeing that, unsurprisingly, nobody was budging, Brown turned around and rode back to his men. “Set up camp. It is time yet for another siege!”

Chapter 153: Chapter CXLIV – For these be the days of siege.



44th of Spring 5860
Aroghlie, March of Zon’guldac

BOOM!

A line of cannons roared from the siege camp. Stone cannonballs whizzed past, only to harmlessly break on the walls.

Thwomp... BOOM!

A gunpowder-packed cannonball from Ayomide speeded past too – and exploded right on top of the wall, raining the garrison with shrapnel. “Jackpot!” shouted Ayomide.

“Perfect timing on the fuse. Cut it at the same size again.” Rabanowicz had followed the explosion with her new dwarf-approved pair of binoculars. She was assisted by Watanabe and a few other siege engineers, who were all administering this one canon. They all move in unison, allowing the canon to be shot every thirty seconds or so when their shot was calibrated. Since it was operated by air magic, the canon didn’t heat up, so there was no need to even cool it down.

Thwomp... BOOM!

This one, shifted a bit to the right, hit another section of the wall with shrapnel. Ayomide and co. swept the wall thoroughly, making sure that no sane men would try and garrison themselves on top of it.

With the walls cleared, Rabanowicz’s new old invention came rolling into view: the battering (?) ram. It was a closed triangular wooden structure with wheels, covered in fresh hides which were hard to burn. Without anyone on the walls left, there wasn’t much of anything that the defenders could use to defend against it. Not that they would feel the need to: there was no ram to batter the walls down. It was just a covered cart, with seemingly nothing related to battering or ramming. It travelled along the wall, the people dragging the “battering ram” dropping off wooden barrels

connected by trails of gunpowder by regular intervals. Then the ram was dragged back to camp, a gunpowder trail following behind it.

Most of the camp had gathered into formation, getting ready for what was about to come up next. Rabanowicz had long taken a break after the cannon had been calibrated. She borrowed a linstock (a staff that holds a burning match) from the operator of another cannon, and she held it against the gunpowder trail which had been led towards the camp. Gunpowder, being a low explosive, burns very quickly rather than directly detonating like the high explosives which were a faraway dream for a place like Gemeinplatz. Hence the gunpowder trail didn't explode, rather, a flame travelled through the trail until it reached the barrels.

Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonnerronntuonnthunntrovarrhounawnskawntoohooordenenthurnuk!

The line of barrels under the walls quickly exploded, one by one, in spectacular flame-laden explosions. For a brief second the heavens and earth had seemingly become one. Everyone, even the enemy behind the walls, paused to silently admire the flames and smoke rising from the ground. A wave of heat hit their faces, ruining hairdos and knocking helmets off. Another layer of smoke and debris rose up when the slate walls collapsed from having its foundations knocked off.

Then all was silent again.

The men couldn't even see the man next to them due to the smoke covering everything. All that was heard was a "Forward!" from Brown that caused them to start walking forward. The grass under their boots turned to burnt turf, then newly dug earth, then to slate debris. All that could be heard were boots crushing and kicking the debris along with coughing. The air was oppressive with how much smoke and dust it contained. First the troops climbed up the slope of debris, then slowly off, entering Zon'guldac. Slowly, as they went further, the smoke dissipated, which revealed how out of formation they had gotten in their march.

A flurry of arrows pelted the troops, who even in formation couldn't exactly deal with projectiles. The pikes required two hands to hold which didn't leave room for shields, and the troops of the Republic were generally lightly armed. The culprits were a line of archers standing on the road that led to the entrance of the underground part of Aroghlie. A lot of the troops were covered by urban buildings thankfully, but the street was narrow and not many men could push through it at once.

"So, what do we do? Overwhelm them?" asked Ayomide, who had entered the town alongside Brown.

"No, that'd be way too costly. We'd lose too many men trying to cross that road... just tail the musketeers, I have an idea." Brown rode forward to give orders to the 1st Ranger Regiment who were all armed with muskets. Seeing all the smoke and debris cover their approach had given him an idea. Ayomide too took the horse to order the men around, for them to follow the 1st Ranger Regiment.

A group of musketeers, enough to block the street with a line two men deep, emerged to confront the bowmen. They formed a line, the first line kneeling and the second standing, as quickly as possible to not lose too many men to arrow fire. They shot at the archers, not wounding many from this far away range, but creating smoke from the gunpowder weaponry. Then a second line of musketeers appeared from behind the smoke, similarly hastily forming up and shooting their shot.

The archers continued shooting into the smoke, but it was way harder to score a kill not knowing where the enemy was.

The musketeers continued emerging from the smoke and firing, their lines moving closer and closer to the archers as they moved up the street. Eventually the last line fired, and the next thing to emerge from the smoke were the pikemen who had been pouring sneakily through the smoke. The swords and knives of the archers were no match for the range of the pikes as they were overrun and killed.

The column of pikes moved up and up, to in front where the grand gate into the Aroghlie itself lay. Carved inside the mountain were another group of fortifications manned by the elves.

“So...” Ayomide didn’t even bother completing her sentence.

“Let’s wait for a few minutes. They should be here soon” replied Brown calmly.

A few minutes passed. Then a few more. Then screams and shouts came out of the wall fortifications, before the gate swung open and a group of dwarves came out by Whitebeard came out. “Sorry for the delay, there were a few too many collaborator dwarves who tried to stop us.” It had been nothing more than a brief underground urban skirmish though.

“Those underground dwarven tunnels sure are convenient” muttered Ayomide. The tunnels that they had made their escape had now been used for exactly the opposite.

“The dwarves are quite clever, thank the Lord.” Brown heaved a deep sigh as the siege was successfully complete. “Now, a sweep around the city to capture any stragglers, then we set up camp.”

“Aye, old man.” Ayomide rode away to make the required arrangements.

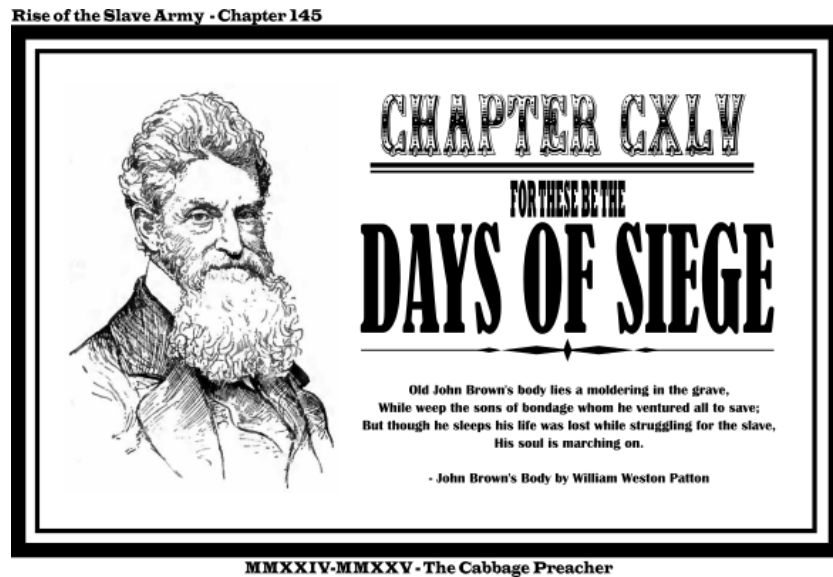
The troops dispersed to set up, with only the cavalry remaining in the streets to patrol for any elven troops. A group of curious dwarves, seeing that the battle was done, came out of the cave to see the flag of the Republic being hung over the gate. The flag now had four stars, having been prepared for the occasion of Aroghlie’s (re)capture.

Whitebeard looked at the seemingly banner flying on the dwarven gate. Most of the dwarves around her seemed not too happy with the seemingly foreign banner flying in their city. For now, they were way too happy to have the elves expelled to openly complain. Dwarven independence since time immemorial had come to an end, and... nobody cared too much.

“Oh well.” A simple shrug, as done by Whitebeard and many dwarves around her. She turned around, walking away to get sloshed at the nearest watering hole.

On the night of 44th of Spring 5860, taverns in Aroghlie reported record profits.

Chapter 154: Chapter CXLV – For these be the days of defense.



45th of Spring 5860 Aroghlie, Union of Dwarves

The Army of the Republic had regathered on the square in the middle of Aroghlie. Their regimental banners flew excitedly in the wind, so did the flags of the Republic which was hung in the houses around the square.

There was a celebratory, ceremonial mood in the air as some of the dwarves in the army had requested leave after the liberation of their homeland. They were leaving their uniforms and weapons behind, handing them to new troops who had volunteered from the liberated town. Some men had lost their lives on the march, some had lost it during the battle, but the new volunteers meant that these negligible losses were already replenished. They'd receive training on the march, whenever the army would set up camp, since today the Army of the Republic was to go on the march. They were only waiting for...

"Mayor Whitebeard." Brown welcomed the dwarven lady with a handshake (having to lean down due to their height difference) as she entered the square with an entourage of dwarves. "Good morning."

"Good morning, I've got my ministers councilmen right here. We're ready to hold the fort down while you're gone." Whitebeard gave their names one by one "We've already gotten work to gather a National Guard unit for our Union, to first repair the walls and then to restart work on the highway."

"Praise the Lord, this part of the operation seems to be going well. Admittedly, I estimated Aroghlie to be the easy part. We've had your support here, but for the elves... hopefully deposing their chief is enough, to remove the threat for now."

"If you manage to make her armies scatter, then I don't think she'll be able to break through our walls again. At most she can then act as a nuisance, maybe a glorified bandit."

Brown shook his head “That could still do great damage. Beyond the elven forest lies the way to the Imperial capital, but I don’t think we’d be able to march forces large enough through that forest without losing too many men on the way. Ideally, we’d be making plans to strike the Imperial core directly while the Empire seems unstable from the great changes being forced upon it. For now however – for now we have to deal with much more immediate threats.” He turned towards gathered troops and shouted “Captains! Get ready to march out!”

On his orders Ayomide and co. began commanding the troops into formation. The rookies slowed down the process a bit, but in the end, four thousand men had lined up in columns. For Gemeinplatz standards this was a large army, it looked impressive, but would it be enough to deal with the coming storm? The only way to answer was that to march, and so “March!” they did.

The dwarves, whoever wasn’t too hungover after last night anyways, curiously watched the procession from their windows. Some of them were on the streets, handing their liberators food and drink for the upcoming journey, some were cheering from the window, and a few were silently watching this odd thing called “the Republic” take march. The remains of the walls of Aroghlie had been cleaned up a bit last night, to make a comfortable passage out for the men. They passed by the ruins of the walls that they had blown up yesterday, hoping that they wouldn’t have to come back to blow it up all over again.

The columns walked forward, until they turned around, the opposite direction of the half-built highway of the Republic. The highway to Periligoul was one left over from the Empire, mostly maintained because it served as a connection point between eastern Gemeinplatz and the capital. In front of them lay dense forest, denser than anywhere in Gemeinplatz, that seemed to await them with its open, gaping maw.

The Army of the Republic began its march towards the elven lands.

47th of Spring 5860

Karabush, State of Karabush

Tubman stood on the walls of Karabush, watching the landscape spread in front of her. The area lacked trees; it was vast grassland that seemingly stretched forever. A few trees here and there, loads of bushes, and a mass of tents parked right in front of the walls. The biggest mass of people she had seen ever since her timely death.

The enemy army certainly wasn’t numbered forty thousand, maybe twenty thousand at most. That wasn’t too surprising – mobilization, especially on such short notice, was certainly not easy business. Some had certainly either died on the way, deserted, or had never shown up in the first place. Some had certainly stayed back to keep watch for potential slave rebellions or bold counterattacks. Tubman had also done her best, with the inexperienced men she had, to harass the enemy on their way. Ambushes, damaging roads, and evacuating villages... if she had to retreat again Tubman would do as the Russians did to Napoleon.

“How are things looking, Miss Tubman?” Kyauta appeared quietly and suddenly right behind Tubman, as usual.

“A bit better than I imagined, thank the Lord” replied Tubman. “Not good mind you, but, better. We’ll just have to wait and see what Providence has in store for us.”

“They’re setting up the cannons already.” Kyauta pointed at the ground below, where the first canons had been dragged forward by siege engineers.

“We should be able to maintain the walls better than the ones before us. We have much more men garrisoned here. We could delay and hold them here for a few months, I feel. The only issue is...” A thousand men. One town, a relatively small one. They had captured the town without having sieged it, so the town still had its supplies remaining, but the garrison was way oversized for the previous administration’s preparations. “...food. If Captain Brown doesn’t arrive in two weeks, we’ll begin starving. That’s with us giving minimum rations to everyone.”

“...what do we do if we begin starving?” asked Kyauta reluctantly.

“We pray to God that we won’t get to that point.” Tubman of course had a plan for such a case, but she’d rather not think about even the possibility.

“Understood. I will pray as hard as I can” replied Kyauta.

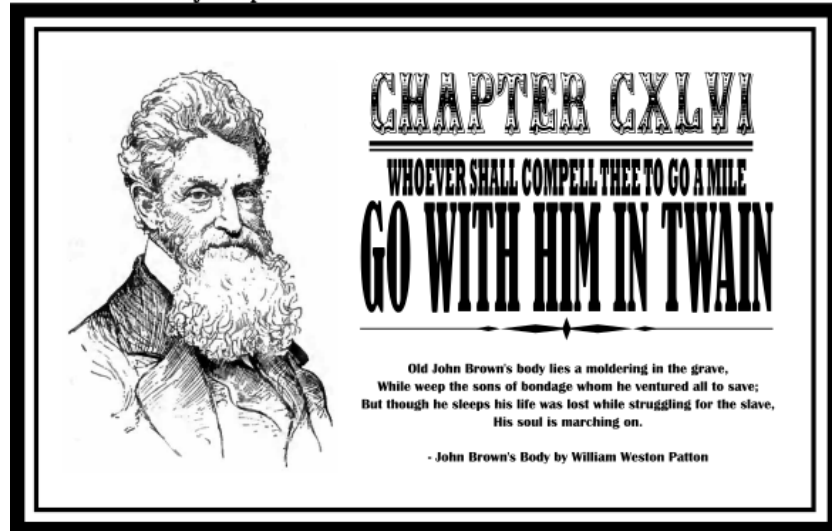
“That’s about all we can do, outside of pelting our besiegers with the occasional projectile. Pray, hope, and wait. I’m sure the righteous will see their victory.” Tubman continued watching the scene down below. It was a disorganized gathering of men. The banners of various noble houses flew down below, denoting who owned what part of the army. Knights in shining armor were sitting down on stools, playing a round of cards, while levies in plain clothes were sitting by fires and entertaining themselves with a chat. Below was twenty thousand souls, all united in the sole purpose to murder Tubman and co. United against a cause that they barely understood or heard of, other than being told that the forces of the Demon King needed to be defeated and the slaves returned to their rightful place.

Her thoughts were interrupted with a BOOM as one of the cannons below were lit up. Tubman felt the ground beneath her shake as a cannonball lodged itself to the wall.

The siege of Karabush had begun, again.

Chapter 155: Chapter CXLVI – Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him in twain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 146



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

47th of Spring 5860
Karabush, State of Karabush

Mayor Gabriel Satō-Wang of Bolipoli.

The man. The myth. The third cousin of Count Leon Satō-Wang. “These savages sure are contentious.”

Ted.

The servant, who last appeared about a hundred chapters ago. He comes back, having escaped the demise of his lord, and found employ with his cousin. “They’ve led to the demise of at least two of your family members, sir.”

“All from them trying to reclaim and hold on to that accursed county...” They were in a tent, in the siege camp right outside of Karabush. Surrounded by countless men, countless warriors, countless fools trying to do what his two cousins tried to do.

“Do you think it will go any different, sir?” asked Ted seemingly innocently.

“We have twenty thousand men in this camp, and yet...” His eyes were on the walls. They were still standing of course; the fugitives had been quick to meet each cannonball with a repaired wall.

“...and yet?”

Gabriel would have smashed his fist on a table to make a point, but all he could do was pound the earth with his boot. “And yet, that’s what all my cousins thought too! I’m not going to even start pretending like I have confidence that things will go well. I’m here just because the guys outside wanted somebody with a claim to Casamonu. No sane man would risk their life just for that stupid border county!”

“O-of course, nobody would risk their life for that stupid place.” Ted laughed, having casually disrespected all his previous masters.

“Yet they did.” Gabriel shook his head. He shook it again, and again, each time shaking faster. “Now we’re about to do the same thing, again.”

“I’m sure it will go well sir.”

Gabriel could only sarcastically reply, “I’m sure it will, Ted.”

48th of Spring 5860

The forest around Periligoul, March of Zon’guldac

The forests of Zon’guldac. Thick, dense, green, and full of “elves!”

The Army of the Republic, having to march in a long column to even fit into the narrow path that cut through the forest, was always overextended. The musketeers of the 1st Ranger Regiment formed up wherever they could, while the pikemen formed around them. It was far from an organized military formation, in fact there were dozens upon dozens of tiny little ad hoc formations that had been formed by men huddling up to whichever column was closest to them.

The sound of hooves pounding the earth got closer and closer. Nobody could tell where and how much with all the trees blocking them. They were getting closer, and closer, but where? When?

“Argh!” One lone pikeman suddenly found himself skewered at the end of a cavalryman’s spear. A few more followed, as the horses charged across the narrow path. Muskets were raised, then fired without any command and coordination, but the elves had already ridden back into the forest and disappeared.

The road which should have taken two days at most had dragged on to the third day, as the Army of the Republic was constantly forced to a stop by the elven guerillas.

Finally, Brown saw an opening in the forest. A lake, surrounded by tree houses. Not much of a city, town, or even a village by human standards. It had no walls, no way of defending itself outside of the houses being elevated. There were no people walking on the streets, no life. “Halt!” The officers relayed Brown’s orders, and the entire army halted.

“What’s wrong, old man?” Ayomide rode up to him, clearly annoyed at having been stopped at the gates of the enemy.

“I think they’ve taken a page out of our playbook.” He didn’t see any wires, rope, or any other thing indicating a trap. But... “...even if they haven’t trapped this place, they’ve already done a good job at whittling down our forces. Trying to hold on to an empty settlement would be useless.”

“It... definitely would be useless.” Ayomide really wanted to burn the place down in revenge, but she knew very well how the old man was a stickler about “honorable warfare”. “What do we do now?”

“Simple, we don’t enter Periligoul. We navigate around its perimeter, and then continue our way to Bolipoli. It’s clear that the elves do not wish to join our Republic, and so we won’t force them.”

So, the Army of the Republic pivoted back on the road, continuing its arduous march.

48th of Spring 5860
Periligoul, March of Zon'guldac

Periligoul was back alive, it's streets filled with the usual elven folk once more. The only sign that an army had just marched through were the foot and hoofprints on the road.

Chieftainess Tinatin Leafblower was laughing back to her throne room, attended by her myriad retainers. She regretted having built her palace so high up a tree, but it also provided such a good view that climbing all the stairs was worth it. Sitting on a throne all day made a good and entertaining view necessary to stay sane.

"They didn't even... did they think I trapped the place or something? That wasn't even my plan!" The entire village had hidden on top of the surrounding forest, perched on top of trees. They had watched the army leave the town intact. "Be a man at least and loot the place, for gods' sake. We have plenty worth looting here, don't we?" She turned to her servants around her. They nodded in unison. "There must be something wrong in the heads of these savages, I swear."

Tinatin took her seat, in the relatively modest wooden throne. All elven furniture was wooden and copper in fact, so it looked quite modest compared to everything else in Gemeinplatz. She stared out into the field, the field where four thousand men had just passed and left without harming even a branch on their trees.

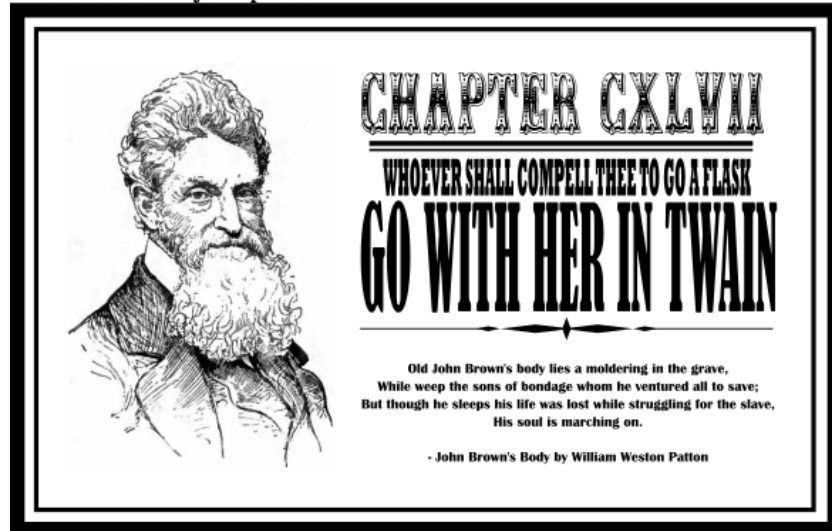
"My lady, what do you wish us to do?" asked a servant.

"It's quite warm, fan me" Tinatin took time to enjoy the cool breeze, before continuing "and, keep your eye on these Imperials and 'Republic' people. I might have to reconsider my position depending on how those two tussle..."

"...oh, and get me some fruit. I'm starving here."

Chapter 156: Chapter CXLVII – Whosoever shall compel thee to go a flask, go with her in twain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 147



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

49th of Spring 5860 A village, March of Zon'guldac

One thing that Watanabe had noticed soon after arriving in Gemeinplatz was the sheer amount of walking one needed to do.

Back home he could hop on a car, a bus, even traverse the whole nation on rail and return home in time for dinner. Gemeinplatz, however, was a completely different story. Even if the concept of “maintaining paved roads” was a progressive idea for its time, it didn’t eliminate all the walking needed to get from A to B. Especially for Watanabe, who didn’t feel comfortable on horseback. It turned out that riding a horse was much harder than just mounting it and praying to the eight million *kami* that it trots the right direction. So, on footback he was, accompanied by Rabanowicz who too was travelling on her two feet out of sympathy for her assistant.

At least one good thing about all this travel is that one got used to it. Watanabe was surprised at how quickly he had adapted. Not that he had gotten any more muscular, he couldn’t get anywhere enough protein in Gemeinplatz to achieve that, but he had just gotten used to his legs aching. More than getting used to it even – man was made for the great outdoors. He hadn’t felt this energetic and alive in a long while, despite currently accompanying an army and being under the threat of imminent death. It somewhat felt like a permanent holiday despite him working every single day, at least compared to being stuck in a cubicle all day long with people he’d rather murder than work with. Now he had friends, comrades that he’d rather die for.

“Doctor, what’s the plan for our meal when we stop?” Watanabe was ignored; Rabanowicz was reading while walking, and she had gotten way too deep into a Gemeinplatzish chivalric romance novel. Watanabe had to tap her on the shoulder and repeat the question once she grumpily turned her head over to him.

“I’ve still got some hardtack in the bag, and a bit of pemmican” replied Rabanowicz, immediately turning back to her book.

Watanabe checked his pockets... a few groschen coins jingled there. “How about we treat ourselves a little today?”

Rabanowicz’s eyes followed the jingles, and she followed with a pat of her own pockets. A whole lot more coins jingled in response, the frugal lady she was. “Whatever we can find when we encamp then.”

It took a few more hours before the sun began setting, and so time came to stop the march for the day. They set up camp right next to a village, who had all made their escape to the forest in view of the incoming “savage army”. When night proper rolled around, and seeing that their houses weren’t being plundered, the villagers came back out of hiding to a surprisingly polite welcome. It was just common sense in Gemeinplatz that an incoming army, enemy or even friendly, would make generous use of the convenient loot that a village offered. Most armies were underfunded and underfed, lords not willing to set up the proper logistical structure needed to fund a force that they barely even made use of. Nor would a feudal lord have the ability to set up such an extensive support structure outside of their territory. Thus, outside of Brown having explicitly forbidden looting innocent civilians, the Army of the Republic didn’t depend on looting to feed itself like its many counterparts in Gemeinplatz.

The camp was set up right next to the village, and soon enough, it was flooded with villagers using the opportunity to trade. One thing a pre-modern army brought along with it was a supporting caravan of camp followers, and if they weren’t being looted by the army they were attached to, the villagers found their services quite convenient. Some got a new pair of shoes, another a spiffing set of cutleries, and a few spent quality times with others other than their spouse.

For Watanabe, his interest lay in finding something delicious to eat. Looking around, there were a plenty providing plenty of delicious food... for plenty of money. “Something not too expensive, not too meager... aha!” Watanabe spotted his target: a woman carrying jugs of milk. He took two cups from Rabanowicz’s bag, then headed over to her. A coin he handed over, and two cups of milk he got in return.

“Dairy doesn’t do my stomach well, monsieur, but, thank you.” Rabanowicz took the cup with the hint of a smile.

“It doesn’t do me well either, but I missed the taste.” When was the last time Watanabe had milk by itself? Probably way back in elementary. He raised the cup up to its lips, before taking a sniff. It didn’t smell expired thankfully, but, the possibility of expiration made him think of another possibility that made him not take a sip “Hm. I wonder if...”

“What do you wonder, monsieur? Has it gone bad?” Rabanowicz took a sniff of the milk. It smelled just like ordinary cow’s milk.

“If... if...” Watanabe couldn’t find the word for it in the local language. He couldn’t find a bunch of words. Pasteurization, bacteria, salmonella. “...if this has been treated.”

“Treated?”

“You know, you need to heat the milk up to get rid of the... the... diseases inside it.” That’s the best Watanabe could do. “Back home we did it with all the milk that was sold, I remember it being

a pretty big deal. I don't want to catch a disease and die from milk in another world."

"If what you are saying is true, that'd indeed be a terrible way to go." Rabanowicz didn't take a sip either. Instead, the doctor and his assistant got to taking out their pan and lighting up a fire. They lit some kindling from a fire that was already burning in camp, and then laid a few logs on top of it. In a few minutes the milk was heated up. Watanabe stopped before it began boiling, so he wouldn't be hurting his precious lips. Back into the cups the milk went. Now it was pleasantly warm alongside with not being potentially full of e. coli.

"Cheers." Watanabe clanged the cup of milk with Rabanowicz. They sipped on the milk slowly, to appreciate the taste. It was quite good, being fresh milk.

"...so, what happens when you heat the milk up?" Rabanowicz wasn't exactly believe in magical thinking.

"Uhm... so, there are little living things that live on everything, right? The ground, the water, the air... So small that you can't see them with your own eyes."

"Monsieur, what are you talking about?" Rabanowicz's world had been a bit early for germ theory, which on Earth became accepted only in the 19th century.

"Mm. Basically, little living beings that multiply by feeding on whatever they can find. Some of them multiply in milk and make you sick when you ingest them alongside your drink. They die in the heat."

"Interesting theory." Of course, Rabanowicz wasn't about to believe in such bold claims without empirical evidence. She quickly thought up of an experiment "Give me your flask."

"O-okay?" Watanabe gave the flask of water that he carried around. Rabanowicz dumped the fresh water, much to his horror "Wait-"

"Don't worry monsieur, I'll pay back with something better." She emptied her own flask of water as well, then handed both back to Watanabe. "Fill both with milk, then come back to me." She handed one groschen coin to him.

Watanabe obliged, finding the same woman and coming back with both flasks filled and sealed. "Thank you for the generous gift."

"It isn't a gift, it's an experiment." Rabanowicz took Watanabe's flask and heated it over the fire. "If you say that there are these little living beings in the air spoiling our food, and that heat kills them, then this flask of yours shouldn't spoil after I heat it up."

Watanabe nodded "It shouldn't, yeah."

"Then, the milk is yours if it doesn't spoil by tomorrow morning." Rabanowicz didn't heat her own flask up, to be a control group. "If it does spoil... I'll have you drink your words up, monsieur."

Watanabe hoped for the safety of his guts that he had remembered things correctly. The rest of the night was spent constructing a tent before both of them immediately crashed on their blankets. The fatigue from walking so much tended to hit suddenly, the moment that one had an opportunity to rest.

As the sun rose and the drums were beat to wake the troops up, Rabanowicz immediately rolled over to check her own flask. Plop. She immediately grimaced as a foul smell emanated inside the tent. “As expected. Yours?”

Watanabe took a deep breath, prayed to the myriad gods for his guts to not be destroyed that day, and then popped open his flask. A sniff. It smelled like milk, like it had yesterday. “Hah! I win!” He took a victorious swig of the white liquid that wasn’t about to cause a pretty crappy death.

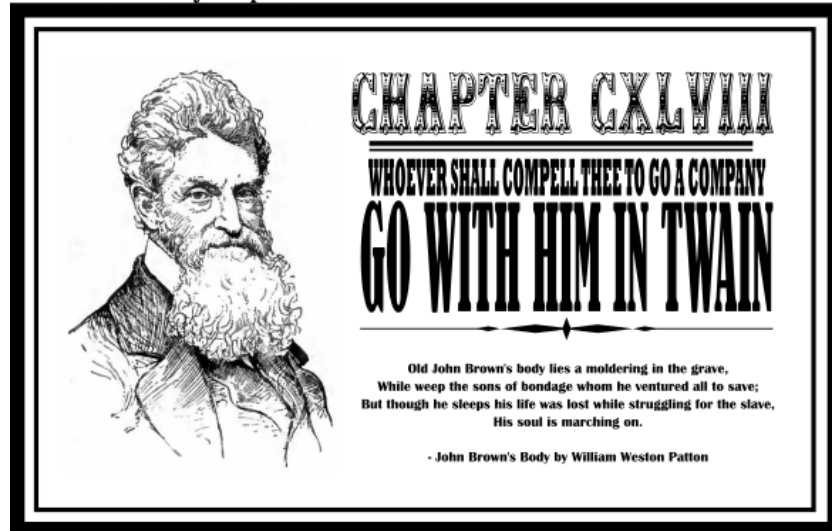
“How curious.” Rabanowicz, of course, dumped the milk she had on to the earth below. No way she was about to take her chances with the fun surprises that spoilt milk had in store. “I’ll have to investigate this further when we’re at rest.”

For now, they began packing the tent up for another day of constant marching. Unbeknownst to them they’d made a discovery that’d potentially save countless people.

Gemeinplatz had today seen the birth of the field of microbiology.

Chapter 157: Chapter CXLVIII – Whosoever shall compel thee to go a company, go with him in twain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 148



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

51st of Spring 5860 Copperworks, Libertycave

The copperworks was busy today; not only in its main building where its smelteries were, but its newly-established office that had been constructed right next to it. Its main room was quite large, currently housing Bilal and a few assistants. There was a central table with papers and writing implements stacked on it. On a cork board there was a map of Casamonu printed by the New Inkwell Printworks, and a series of pins were stuck to it. Each pin pinned a small piece of paper with a name and a number attached to it.

“Three crates from site number seven, four from number eight...”

An assistant, a young man named Ejike who had found employment, was noting these numbers down to a logbook. Most of Mount Curry had become abandoned as the owners of mines either lost their slaves to a raid or heard news of such raids and ran for their lives. Outside of mines, the only semi-regular inhabitants of the mountain were shepherds and the occasional eccentric hermit. Thus, the mountain had to be resettled, and there were many eager to do so in search for profit. Bilal had helped by subsidizing to-be-foremen looking to reopen mines, in exchange for getting more favorable prices for the copperwork of course.

Bilal checked through the numbers once they were in one place. A few months ago, he didn't even know how to read or do math. Neither did most of his associates, and now they had become craftsmen, accountants, businessmen... He had begun to understand why one of the first things Brown pushed for was literacy. It helped quite a lot to have people educated in at least the basics.

“It's always the dwarf-operated mines, huh” commented Bilal when he reached the bottom of the page. “So much output compared to everyone else.”

Ejike shrugged “I’ve heard of the human miners try to gleam information off of them about their techniques, but unsurprisingly, they’re quite secretive.”

“We’ll get them to speak eventually. Now that they’re part of the Republic, they should do their part to help everyone else.” Bilal let go of the matter now, and dragged a stack of stone tablets resting on the table towards himself. A bunch of orders for refined copper. He couldn’t read the dwarven script of course, but prospective buyers were usually helpful enough to include a tally mark at the back of the tablet. Each mark represented one fifth of a crate, a standard copper counting system developed long before between human and dwarven merchants.

“I think we should have enough to fulfill all these orders.” There were already a few spare crates of copper ingots left over from the last batch, so Bilal took a few of the tablets and dropped them into the crates. The deliveryman was a dwarf who could read the addresses given at the front of the tablets.

“No, we won’t exactly have enough once the ore is refined” Ejike pointed out.

Bilal paused, long enough to have a brilliant idea “I’m sure there should be a few copperworks in Casamonu willing to sell their copper to us, for cheaper than we can sell it for. We can get the deliveryman to pick up the copper on the way to Zon’guldac.” A bit of arbitrage, to put it in modern business terms.

Now that the copper side of the copperworks were done with, there were two letters that had stood at the bottom of the pile of stone tablets.

One, from the Commander-in-Chief. “An order for another thousand pikes.” He slid it over to Ejike. It was far from an unusual order by now. No more needed to be said. Another regiment, another bunch of pikes for the army of the Republic. Bilal didn’t demand payment still – from a moral standpoint, he understood well enough as a former slave that slavery was wrong and did his best to eradicate it. From a business perspective, it was favorable to them to expand the relatively laissez-faire market of the Republic. More labor to hire to the copper mines, more craftsmen to refine the copper, more people to buy it... A bunch of pikes weren’t going to make them bankrupt when the copper already sold like hotcakes.

Two, from Casamonu. ““Mister Bilal, we currently lack anyone to head our branch in Casamonu.’ Oh. I *did* forget to designate someone...”

Bilal circled around the table a few times, thinking. There were... a lot of employees in the copperworks by now. He didn’t personally have much of an acquaintance with many of them, and that was true for the team he had sent over to establish business in Casamonu as well. Who was he supposed to pick out of a vast list of names? “Who did we send there? We should have a list.”

Ejike flipped and flipped the pages, until he came across notes from a few weeks ago. “Here they are.”

Bilal looked over the names and... he couldn’t even remember the faces of some of them. “...at this point, I might as well pick one at random.” He closed his eyes and circled his finger over the list, before being interrupted by a question.

“How about the people there elect someone into the role? Like how we do with mayors.” A simple idea: bring democracy to the workplace. “I’m sure the people there would know each other enough to pick someone capable?”

The eyes of Bilal opened. He could pick someone random... or, leave the responsibility to the people there. If something went wrong, it wouldn't be his fault. If something went right, it was because he gave them the idea. "You know what, that's an excellent idea."

Bilal quickly drafted up the response to the workers over at Casamonu:

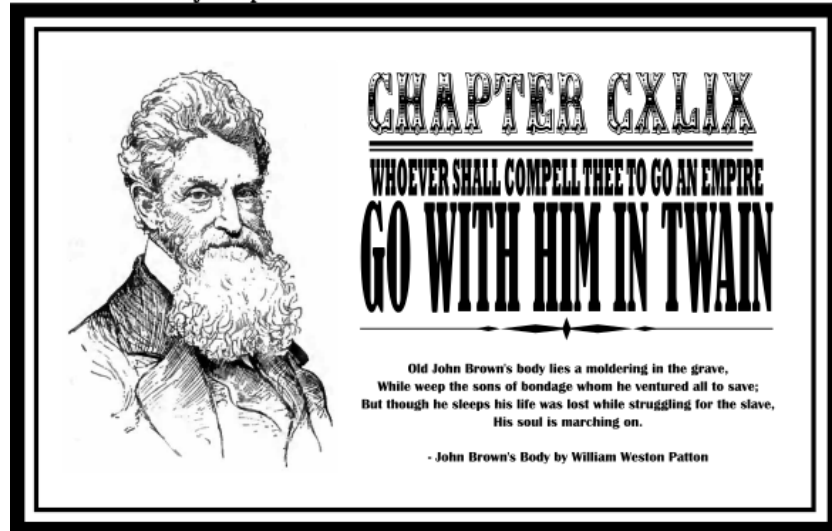
"Go elect your own leader."

At that moment it was a decision to shoo away a minor headache, something seemingly inconsequential. But then Bilal had another idea. He was sure he'd get elected too, and it'd be a pretty good way to legitimize his leadership, so...

"Let's hold elections for who leads the copperworks."

Chapter 158: Chapter CXLIX – Whosoever shall compel thee to go an empire, go with him in twain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 149



MMXXIV-MMXXV - The Cabbage Preacher

53rd of Spring 5860 The Gray Palace, Imperial Capital of Hauptstadt

The Imperial chancellery office, once a mostly cosmetrical office for a mostly cosmetrical Imperial authority, was buzzing with activity again like the old days.

The model of the renovated Hauptstadt he meant to built was moved to be the centerpiece of the room, now grander than ever with many, many more buildings added to the model. The Gray Palace in the middle, upgraded to have a giant dome, then various ministries built around it, with a grand wall protecting the entire complex from the common rabble. Several layers of wall, in fact, with several different courtyards overlooking each other to shred attackers to bits as they tried to climb up. A grand structure, which would be nigh impossible to construct with the current architectural technology of Gemeinplatz.

Chancellor Spear however, worried not. His will would triumph, one way or the other. He leaned on desk holding the model, with a giddy smile that's shared by every man who builds miniature models. "A capital to last a thousand years!" he shouted all of a sudden, unable to help himself. He would surpass his Leader who raised him. Spear would make a thousand-year empire a reality. He would-

Knock knock! "...come in."

A soldier. Dressed in his new clothes: a slate gray button-up gambeson, with an incongruously modern-looking steel helmet perched on top of his head. Nobody was allowed to enter Imperial offices with weaponry, so, he was unarmed.

"Hail the Emperor!" shouted the Protection Squadron soldier with his arm raised forward, doing the salute introduced by the Chancellor.

“Hail the Emperor” replied Spear, who himself thought that the whole gesture was ridiculous. Its purpose was to be ridiculous. A simple loyalty test, to see who would go along with it and who wouldn’t. Those who didn’t comply, it was simple: they were untrustworthy. Those who did comply were at least afraid and cowardly enough to comply with such a ridiculous order to escape attention. At what point, at which ridiculous order, would they say “stop”? A salute was simple enough, a way to break their spirit and plant that seed of doubt within them. If they could be made to comply with a simple yet harmless order, they could more easily be made to comply with something less simple. Thus, even such a simple salute was a tool of the New Order of the Chancellor.

“My Chancellor, the betonworks asks for your presence. They have good news.”

Spear nodded. “Excellent. Take me there.”

Spear and the soldier headed out of the chancellor’s office. The palace was still as it was, stone brick, stained decorative windows, winding halls... “We really should knock this entire place down” blurted out Spear. “The palace lacks function and efficiency.”

“Yes, sir.” The soldier could only nod along and comply.

“Architecture is supposed to be functional. Grand, eternal, yet utilitarian. Meant to stay in its place and provide its function evermore. This – why are these columns so decorated? Why are the windows tinted? So many questions, with no appropriate answers. Better to tear the whole place down and start anew...”

“Yes, sir.” The soldier hated being sent to the Chancellor. He had talked about this exact same topic to him before. This was the fourth time. He kept his poker face up in front of the Chancellor, tuning him out while thinking about what to have for dinner today. Meat pie? Meat pie sounded nice. He’d splurge on some meat pie.

“Halt.” Thoughts of meat pie were interrupted by Spear suddenly pausing. They were out in the courtyard now, where a squad of Protection Squadron soldiers were practicing. Their rifle-shaped spears had been replaced by flintlock muskets. An innovation that Spear had thought of himself to have brought here first, though he had yet no idea that Brown had beaten him to it. He only had heard reports that the fugitive slaves had an “unexpected number” of firearms in their possession, and nothing related to the nature of them.

Production of flintlock mechanisms had proved quite difficult with the technology of Gemeinplatz humans, the capital lacking dwarves, but Spear hoped that it’d come useful as a weapon for these elite soldiers initially before they could produce enough for the rest of the Imperial troops. Unlike Brown, he had more than a million people in the capital alone at his disposal.

The PS marched forward in ranks three-men deep, the line stopping with the first rank firing blanks and then crouching to get out of the way of the rank behind them. Then so did the second rank, and then the third. Spear clapped, which prompted them to notice the existence of the Chancellor and all give a salute in unison. Things were going well enough for the troops that he didn’t need to intervene. “I’m starting to understand why the Leader loved his position... Let’s continue.”

In the palace grounds, protected inside the walls surrounding the palace away from curious eyes, was the Chancellor Spear Betonworks. “The fountain of modernity from where it shall flow to all of Gemeinplatz” as the Chancellor so aggrandizingly called it. In plain English, it was a cement factory, its chimneys spewing smoke as a group of workers carried concrete bricks outside of the

building and stacked them on top of pallets. The workers saluted the Chancellor once they disposed of the load in their hands.

“Hail to the Emperor, my Chancellor.” The foreman had snuck up to Spear, and he gave a surprise salute which startled the old man. “As you can see, we have successfully finished our first batch of mass-production beton.” Since the Gemeinplatz language lacked a word for “concrete”, only “concrete” as an adjective and not a material, it was simply referred to with the term that Spear had given them for the material.

“Excellent.” It was excellent indeed. Spear watched stacks upon stacks of blocks come out of the building. So much in so little time, even with relatively primitive kilns. “It’s wonderful what a lump of hydraulic lime can do.” Limestone, clay, and gypsum. What one needs to make what many on modern Earth would recognize as cement. Nothing that the more old-fashioned folk in Gemeinplatz can’t mine up.

“We were wondering if you would be able to increase the deliveries of gypsum, my Chancellor. It’s the only ingredient we’re running short on.”

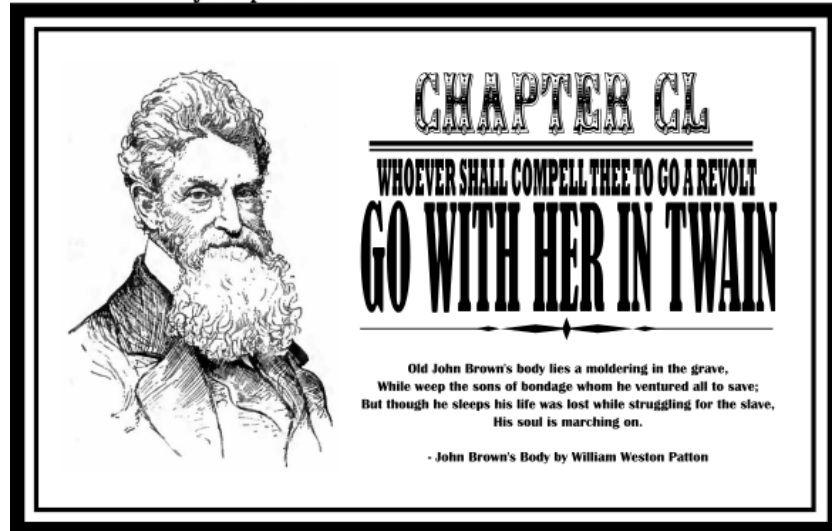
“Hmm... Yes, since you have done such excellent work. I’ll dedicate another work camp to it.” Spear makes a mental note, and then takes a concrete block into his hand. It feels as heavy and sturdy as concrete should be. “Oh, what wonders we can create when we all unite as one instead of bicker. Instead of countless lords controlling their slaves, using them on wasteful production such as that of cash crops, we today have seized on the moment and made Gemeinplatz great. Now production is rational, efficient, concentrated. We’ll easily produce what we need. Who can stand against a corporate body whose organs all work in unison...?” Spear put the concrete block back in its place “Now, that’d certainly make a nice speech. I should note that down.”

“Indeed, my Chancellor.” The foreman too, had learned very well to just nod along the monologues of their dear leader.

“I have business to attend to; keep up the good work.” Spear turned around, to go back to his office for said important work: expanding his miniature city model.

Chapter 159: Chapter CL – Whosoever shall compel thee to go a revolt, go with him in twain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 150



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

53rd of Spring 5860
Outskirts of Bolipoli, County of Bolipoli

“The fifty third.”

So Brown suddenly blurted out, riding in front of the army.

“The fifty third?”

So Ayomide tilted her head at the seemingly random exclamation.

“It has been almost two weeks, young lady, and we are now only approaching Bolipoli. General Tubman had informed us that long ago that they’d be starving in two weeks. Do you get what I mean, young lady?”

“Ah.” Told that she’d be starving in two weeks. Two weeks have passed. Ayomide put one and one together to get two. “Oh.”

“The forest was way harder to navigate than we thought it would be.” Navigating into it was a chore, navigating out was another. First, they had been harassed by elven guerillas, and while that hadn’t been the case on their way out, navigating through the hills and forests had proven much more difficult and time-consuming.

Ayomide had a bright idea “Shouldn’t we rush to Karabush then? Less rest, more walking, such and such.”

John Brown blew on the burning candle that was Ayomide’s idea “The last thing we want is the men being tired when they’re facing overwhelming numbers. The rest of the road is devoid of forest. We’ll go through the southern fork of the highway, the one which connects to Casamonu,

which Vaiz says is much more well-maintained and goes through flatter ground. Three days. I trust General Tubman to be prudent enough to hold her men together for a few more days.”

The walls of Bolipoli were slowly coming to view, visible up from the hill which the men were coming from. They were old, modest, but clearly they could still hold them back for a day or two. Ayomide pointed at it, asking “What about the siege? Won’t that lose us time?”

“A few more days... God willing.” That’s about all the magical thinking Brown could summon in response to that. All they could do was summon the cannons for some explosive thinking directed towards the walls of the town.

Thus, men of the republic begun setting up camp for the day. They were readying up for yet another siege, yet another few days wasted on frankly the most boring of warfare to participate in. War was, as it turns out, quite the idle affair outside of battle. War is, mostly, comprised of decisively not-battle. Training, marching, camping, sieging, then back to marching more... battle was a very, very miniscule part of warfare.

As was customary, it was time for Vaiz to carry a white flag towards the gates and do his duty as a priest. You don’t kill a priest, you don’t kill a diplomat, it’s an extra dickish move to do both. Hence the emergence of the priest-diplomat in Gemeinplatz. Helped by the fact that they had a common uniform to make themselves easily identifiable.

“My name is Vaiz! I am here to negotiate on the behalf of the Republic!”

Vaiz couldn’t see the soldiers up on the walls from his position, so all he could do was shout wildly was swinging his flag around. He hoped there was at least somebody to hear him. Flap flap flap, shout shout shout... His ears hoarse and his arms tired.

Soon, his hopes and prayers were answered by the gates opening. Painfully slowly, as castle gates tend to do. Out came... “a darkskin!?”

“You are- are you trying to trick us, lightskin?!” It was a woman with skin that was surprisingly dark for someone meeting Vaiz at the gate. “The Republic, you say! You don’t look like a fugitive to me!”

“I- I am not a fugitive, just a man of the Div-”

“So you lie!”

Vaiz gulped. There was now a spear tip sitting uncomfortably close to his throat. So uncomfortably close that his Adam’s apple was tickled by it when he gulped. Not comfortable at all. Not comfortable. He was trembling like a newborn lamb who had chowed down on coffee beans for breakfast.

“P-please listen to me. I- I am Vaiz, a priest and the chaplain of the army you see up on that hill. I... don’t believe we are enemies, from what you have spoken of. Please don’t kill me. I, uhm... don’t have wife or children, but, I’d still like to live until the Divine taketh me.”

The woman continued holding the spear against Vaiz’s neck, until she guffawed and lowered her weapon. “A collaborator, huh? A traitor to your race. I like you.” She gave a casual wave to Vaiz “Yenisey, the leader of the people up in these walls. Take me to your leader, I want to talk to them.”

Vaiz humbly bowed back. “Miss Yenisey it is. Follow me, I will show you to our Commander-in-Chief.”

Yenisey could only laugh back at the formal reception she received. “Commander-in-Chief? So that’s what you call the Demon King? I am surprised to see a man of the cloth serve Him.”

“Demon?! May the Divine forbid, I never would!” Vaiz smacked himself on the chest just for saying “demon”.

“What? So are you serving Him or not? We are here to join His army!” Yenisey was just about to raise her spear again before Vaiz shrieked in a squeaky voice and jumped away. “The army of the so-called “anti-“Hero and His master.”

“I believe you are... mistaken about the nature of Mister Brown.” Vaiz shook his head, giving up on trying to edify properly on religious matters. All he could do was turn around and let the woman follow him to Brown’s tent. Passing through the lines upon lines of battle-ready soldiers, who were confused as to why Vaiz was coming back with something other than disappointment following him. “Good news, Mister Brown.”

“Good news?” There were many things Brown expected to hear. A report on the state of the enemy soldiers, how Vaiz had been treated, so on and so forth, that could reveal a lot about the upcoming siege. A simple “good news” was not one of the aforementioned.

“Greetings, lord of darkness! My name is Yenisey!” Yenisey waved casually, but reverently, at Brown. “...you are way lighter than I expected for a lord of darkness. I have seen the legions you command outside, and I am impressed!”

Brown shook his head “My name is John Brown, Miss Yenisey. Call me ‘Mister Brown’ if your wish is to be polite. I am nothing but a man. I do not wish to lord over anyone, for I myself am nothing but a servant of the Lord.”

Yenisey nodded in approval. “If it is your wish, then we shall refer to you as Mister Brown. We are fugitives who were freed by your men. For a while we have waited for your return, up in the mountains. We saw the men of the mayor leave, all of them, they left nothing behind. It was just a matter of informing our brethren in the city and flooding in once they rose up and opened the gates for us.”

“Impressive.” Brown got up from his seat on the bare ground, just to shake the woman’s hand with great respect.

“We wish to join your forces! To march and destroy the Imperials!”

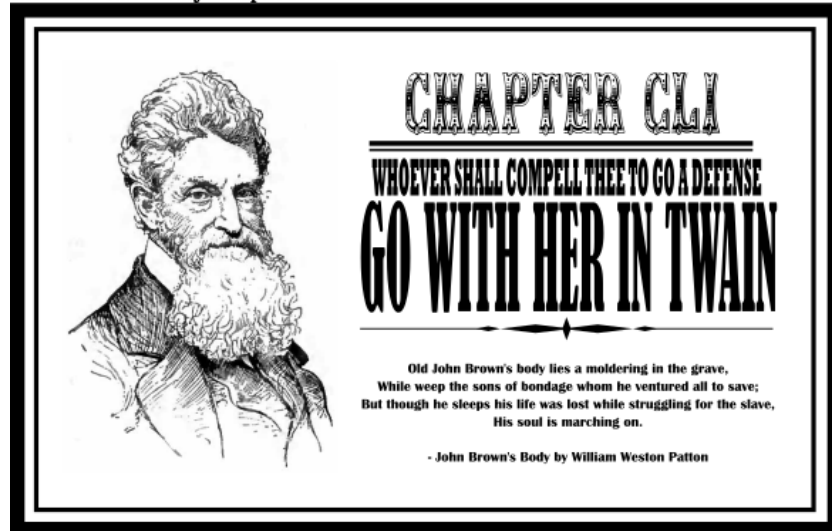
“That’s the spirit, Miss Yenisey. Just to clarify – these are not my forces. These are all free men who serve the Republic of their own volition. They are not mine. I only serve as their leader, until my term is up.”

Yenisey shrugged, clearly not caring about all the details the old man just gave “Whatever! We have a feast set up for you and your men, plenty of lodging too since the garrison is absent. Join us, it’s almost night!”

Thus, on the 53rd of Spring 5860, Bolipoli fell under control of the Republic, and the troops rested and made merry.

Chapter 160: Chapter CLI – Whosoever shall compel thee to go a defense, go with her in twain.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 151



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

54th of Spring 5860
Karabush, State of Karabush

The morning, for the defenders of Karabush.

The old barracks stirs into life again, or it would if it was not awfully quiet. Outside of a few lost to attrition, the thousand or so men were still all there, waking up. A lack of people, the reason for the quiet was not. They lined up in the dining hall of the barracks, with General Tubman entering the queue just like anyone else with Kyauta following behind her.

“General, if you’d like-” A soldier stepped aside, intending to give his position in the queue. He was immediately stopped by Tubman, who pushed him back to his position on the queue.

“You must be new here, young man. If my legs work well enough to lead troops, they work more than well enough to stand in this queue for a few minutes.” Tubman had been used to this treatment by now, being an old lady of her position. All the men had learnt their lesson in not stepping aside for Tubman already.

So Tubman waited, until the cook in charge of their meal dumped her meal: gruel, for the fourth time this week. Not particularly good gruel either. It was basically water with a small spoonful of grain added into it. A very thin meal for people who are meant to go into combat and fight. Still, Tubman gives a thankful nod towards the cook “Lord bless you.” The general and Kyauta try to find a seat in the cramped room, only to give up and sit on the ground.

Leaning on the wall, Kyauta idly takes a sip of the gruel. “Things are dire, aren’t they general?”

Tubman has to take a sip first too. Her throat is so dry that she can’t comfortably talk. “Not much direr than when I was under chains. Nobody to give us a beating, or force us to work. The food’s the same, however. Slightly better, for now.”

“For now...” Forget food, there wasn’t even much water left in these bowls. Even drinkable water was slowly becoming a valuable, something to be rationed. Kyauta had quickly downed the gruel, and she didn’t feel any fuller for it. Not fuller, not any less thirsty. A perpetual state of hunger for everyone in the city.

“Yes, for now. I imagine we won’t be in a shape to fight either by tomorrow or the next day. If the people in the city don’t riot and open the gates first, that is” stated Tubman calmly, taking a last sip out of her swift and meager meal. The calmness that one can only find in a person who has accepted death. “If Mister Brown does not relieve the siege by tonight, we’re charging out tomorrow.”

“We shall have to pray for a miracle.”

For now, with their food finished, the pair headed out to do their business. Out of the barracks, into the streets, where the people eyed them suspiciously. Unlike Casamonu, there hadn’t yet been time yet for fraternization before the siege started. Now the citizens were starving, and unsurprisingly, they blamed their occupiers. Nobody was desperate enough to attack them though... not yet. Not yet.

They reached a tower attached to the walls, where they began the long climb up. These towers were always cramped, winding, to give any potential besiegers coming down a hellish time. To deter them. Unfortunately, they did nothing to protect the greatest weapon of a besieger: starvation. Such walls, so many men, but simply waiting the men inside was unbeatable.

At the top of the walls, it was back to riling the men back up and making sure they were at their position. With starvation kicking in, the movement of the men were sluggish and unwilling. Some of them had even passed out on the embrasures.

Tubman couldn’t help but admit, while shaking the shoulders of an unconscious soldier “It’s dire.”

“So it is” replied Kyauta, shaking awake another. Trying to, anyways. The man had collapsed. No visible wounds, nothing except the face of a man who had become weak from starvation. “He’s dead.” She summoned a nearby soldier to carry the corpse away to be buried.

“How is the situation on the ground?” Tubman approached a sentry, who didn’t look to be too alert.

“Nothing, general.”

Tubman had to agree as she took a look herself. The besiegers were still down there, their camps set up where they had always been. The same banners, the same tents, the same people. Waiting for the defenders to finally go mad from starvation and swing open the gates to surrender. Cannibalism and such were options but... Tubman would rather surrender disgracefully before she made her men resort to that. Perhaps the general had finally gone mad, thinking that she could defend against such a great force. Would Brown’s men even be enough to defeat them, when they were so outnumbered?

“Perhaps this is it.” Tubman idly mumbled. She didn’t sound hopeless. On the contrary, her voice was at its most lively and hopeful. “Providence wishes me to go only so far.”

“What do you mean, Miss Tubman?” Kyauta had joined Tubman on the ground-gazing.

“Captain Brown didn’t ‘succeed’ in his mission either, back home. His death was his achievement, it’s what the Lord had meant for him. Perhaps that too is our fate. To be sacrificed at the altar.”

Kyauta took a deep breath. Grandiose as the speech was, she honestly wasn’t that eager to die. Especially when she had barely been given time to enjoy her newfound freedom. “I... hope not.” When it came down to it, martyrdom wasn’t an enticing option for many.

“You hope not.” Tubman could only nod. A simple nod, while she looked back down. “Are they moving?”

“They...” Kyauta couldn’t believe her eyes.

“A general retreat? No, it’s... the men with the white-green striped banners. Those are the only ones making a leave. About... a thousand. Only a thousand.” For a moment, Tubman had spotted a miracle. Then it had been gone out of sight once reality stepped forward to block the view.

For an hour, they continued watching the men below, hoping and praying for anything to happen. Even an assault, an attack, would be better than the slow and inevitable death they were heading towards. All General Tubman could do was look at the sky. At her Heavenly Father above, surely watching over them.

What was His plan?

54th of Spring 5860

Nondescript hills, State of Karabush

One more day.

The sun has set on Gemeinplatz once more, and the hills have not been kind to Brown and co. They have been marching since the first sunlight hit the hills, to now with torches held up high for light. Even then, the road forward is barely visible.

Brown had left Bolipoli in a rush, letting Yenisey and her rebels hold control of the town while they continued on their campaign to rescue General Tubman and co. The troops were eerily silent, all of them equally too dedicated and tired on their march to say a word. Nobody knew what they’d find once they reached Karabush. Would they find their allies in those walls, or overwhelming enemy forces ready to attack and destroy them? Corpses of their beloved comrades, or the living bodies of their detested enemies? Or both. Both seemed more and more likely with each passing hour, minute, second. More and more desperate, more and more tired...

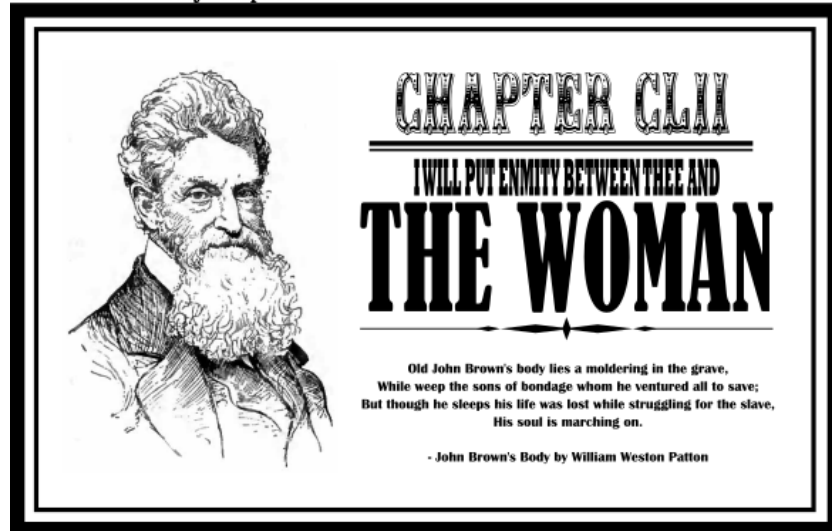
Hooves. Cavalrymen. Panic.

John Brown, an old man entering his sixties, wakes up from his half-sleep induced by hours or fervent and manic prayer. Everyone is suddenly shouting around him. He cannot reason why. Ayomide isn’t around, she has already bolted off to action. The Commander-in-Chief grabs the shoulder of whoever is closest to him. “What’s going on?!”

“The cavalry has spotted an enemy army, Mister Brown!”

Chapter 161: Chapter CLII – I will put enmity between thee and the woman.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 152



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

54th of Spring 5860
Nondescript hills, State of Karabush

“Who are they, young man?” Brown was doing his best to keep his horse calm, but, the panic around him had spread even to his steed.

“I don’t know, captain!” replied the other soldier, before being dragged off by a comrade to prepare a defense.

Brown watched the chaos unfold in front of him, letting out an exasperated “O’ Lord, help us...” He truly had no context and information as to what was happening in front of him, other than the sounds of metal clashing against metal and flintlocks firing. There was a vast ocean of blue uniforms making waves around him, trying its best to flow against the enemy.

On the other side...

Mayor Gabriel had wanted one thing out of life: to not be ambushed by a military force greater than his. For the first several decades of his life, this wish of his had been granted. There wasn’t much fighting going on between massed military forces in Gemeinplatz nowadays, and the Empire had been at peace.

“Who are they?!” Gabriel was trotting around, his horse seemingly moving around like a headless chicken.

“I don’t know, sir!” replied Ted, the ever-faithful servant, whose horse seemed to be undergoing the same fate. All the men around them were running in panic too, horses stuck in this traffic jam of medieval proportions. There was a battle going on somewhere, at least a skirmish, judging from the gunfire followed by the screams of dying men.

Where was it? Why? Who? When? How?

One of Gabriel's retainers were waving his banner around, trying to regroup the men who were only listening to their base survival instinct at this point. Finally, as panic quieted down, the men began gathering around Mayor Gabriel's banner. So did Mayor Gabriel set himself in the middle of this puddle of men, who were beginning to form up with their shields and spears to make a wall, with firearms interspersed between the shields.

A whole load of dust had been kicked up by the ruckus, which didn't help at all with seeing at night. "We were supposed to just slip out... damn It." Gabriel could only listen, as the night seemed to settle down. No footsteps, no clashing, no gunfire, peace.

Peace.

Peace for only a brief moment, a brief tense moment, as chatter and footsteps approach their position. Shadowy figures hidden behind the dust and night; the tip of their pikes lightened up by the moon.

"What do we do, Ted? Our plan to take back Bolipoli seems to not have worked." Not that Gabriel hadn't made up his mind a few minutes ago, he just wanted guidance for guidance sake.

"Fight to the death, sir, reclaim our-"

"Oh, shut up you fool. We were retreating already." Gabriel took a handkerchief out of his pocket and pierced it with the tip of his sword to use it as a makeshift flagpole. He raised the sword up and began swinging it around while shouting "Do not shoot or attack! We surrender, we surrender!"

55th of Spring 5860

Outskirts of Karabush, State of Karabush

"Here it is, the moment of truth, young man and lady."

John Brown, Ayomide... and Shinasi. He had been here all this time, off doing his own thing.

Behind them, five thousand of the Republic's finest men... not that the Republic had any other men in battle-capable state. The only ones not here were the National Guards of the various states and the men of Tubman who...

"Are they still alive?" wondered Ayomide.

From so far away, the whole town was just a reddish-gray blur in the distance. A reddish-gray blur surrounded by a multicolored slurry of tents, banners and men. Twenty thousand, as far as General Tubman had reported. Not that any of them could tell from such a distance. Perhaps they had received reinforcements during that time, perhaps disease had spread through the camp and killed a lot of them. Perhaps everything was just about the same, except for the departure of one of its leaders and his forces. Brown had only briefly asked their new mayoral prisoner a few questions, and other than confirming that there were indeed a lot of men, there wasn't anything interesting coming from him.

Shinasi shrugged and told what he thought in a straightforward manner: "If they are, barely."

“No time for speculation, young man.” What to do, at that moment, was a simple question to answer for Brown: “Now it’s time to do war.”

How to do war, now that was the million-dollar question with an answer that could cost them their lives. Brown began speaking to both Ayomide and Shinasi, a long speech that had the calm, edificative tone of a father giving his children a lesson.

“The terrain is flat around the town, which is where they have set up camp. On the farmlands, where there is space cleared up from the forest covering the area. Now, they surely have spotted us long ago by now, or at least anticipated our arrival. Their camp must be fortified. They have a number’s advantage, and their camp is fortified. Now, young man and lady. What *shouldn’t* we do?”

Ayomide gave the very much obvious answer: “Attack them head-on?”

Shinasi nodded “Yeah, that doesn’t seem like a good idea...”

Brown gave one clap, with a smile. “Indeed, you have learnt the basics at least. If Providence was to be merciful, the enemy troops may die from laughter before we reach them, but I doubt the likelihood of such an absurd miracle happening. Ahem! So, what should we do?”

Shinasi and Ayomide spared the matter thought, for a few minutes. Ayomide had an idea first “Blast their fortifications away with my canon, and then attack them?”

Shinasi went second “It’s still a superior force, though... Us adventurers have a technique, called ‘kiting’, where we bait monsters from place to place. If we could just kite this army away from their fortifications, up into a hill... up into a hill where we have earthworks set up.”

At an impasse. Brown raised a question “What would you do if you were the enemy?”

“I wouldn’t be an idiot and charge us. I wanna take the town. I take the town, and then eliminate the idiots standing right outside the walls.” Thus was Ayomide’s prognosis.

“So, what if we gave the enemy a reason to want to attack us? As I said, kiting.”

“Shinasi... you know, old man, we’re wasting time here, the old woman in that fort must be starving there!”

Brown shook his head “No, I don’t believe we are wasting time. Now, now I have an idea. It should work, if Providence wills it so. A little combination, a dish made from the ingredients you’ve provided, to be served to the folk down below.”

55th of Spring 5860

Right outside the walls of Karabush, State of Karabush

Fweom-BOOM!

A terrifying noise cuts through the camp, a noise that no other cannon shot would. Whistling in the wind, followed by an explosion. A deadly whistle that releases a deadly cloud of smoke and shrapnel, tearing through the unlucky bastards who happened to be right next to it.

In the central tent, a high priest of the temple, and a furious mayor. The Mayor of Changra, the last remaining secular ally of this coalition besieging Karabush. “They’re targeting our men! We’ve tried moving camp, even to an angle where they shouldn’t be able to see... but they keep moving their damned-”

“Language, sir. Do not use such words in front of a man of the Divine.”

The mayor growled and groaned but... he couldn’t exactly go against a man of the cloth in this regard. What he could do was...

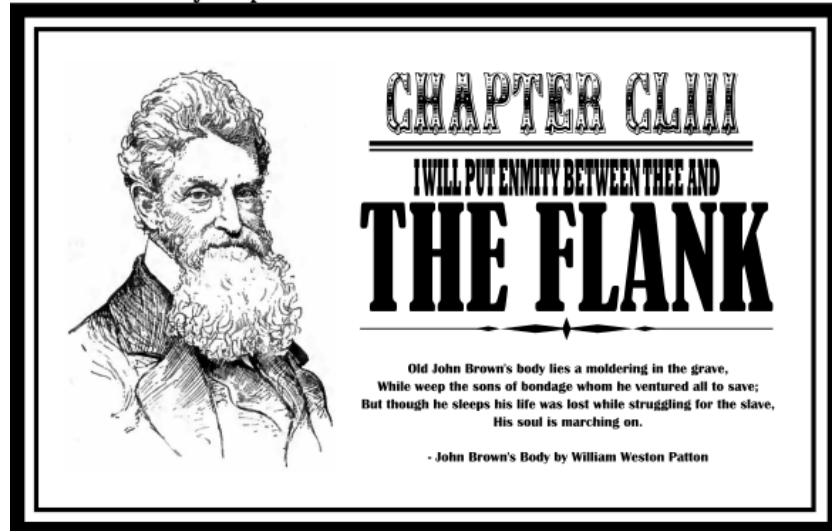
“Me and my men are not happy about this. I’ll have to retreat, or else I’ll incur losses too great. I still have fugitive slaves to put down in my own county, and I’ll need my men to be alive to do that. So...”

The mayor got up, with an indignant look on his face.

“...either you join us in charging up to their camp to disable their canon, or we’ll take our leave just like Sir Gabriel did.”

Chapter 162: Chapter CLIII – I will put enmity between thee and the flank.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 153



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

55th of Spring 5860

Forest on the outskirts of Karabush, State of Karabush

On the low ground, Ayomide and co. were prowling. Not out in the open of course, that'd be akin to suicide with a larger enemy army and its cavalry around, but in the forests that abruptly started around Karabush where the farmland ended.

“They’re moving so slowly... come on, be faster.”

Ayomide, for her part, was perched atop the tallest tree in the area. Just like a cat, if she or anyone else around her knew what a cat was. Her eyes are sharp, able to see far, and so the captain of the regiment also acts as a scout. A scout watching the enemy army and its many, many banners fluttering in the wind.

It was clearly a diverse coalition on the enemy side judging from the variety in equipment and heraldry, with a whole load of angry men coming to take them down. Fifteen thousand of them left, with the retreat of one mayor combined with attrition taking its toll on the besiegers. Still triple the amount of men that the Republic had, but it was a better than the octuple amounts of men initially promised to be coming to take them down.

The men of the 1st Ranger Regiment fell completely silent, as the enemy approached closer and closer. Around a thousand men, in a loose formation, hiding amongst the countless trees of the forest. Passing in front of them, the left flank of the enemy army. Leading in front a unit of mercenary crossbowmen, still too far from the main body of the Republic’s forces to effectively open fire. At their back the melee component of their unit, marching in a square formation ten-men deep with their polearms. Both are very well-armored, all supporting steel cuirasses and helmets at the least, professional warriors they are. Nothing that could be easily penetrated by the copper javelins thrown by yesteryear’s atlats.

Thankfully, Ayomide and her regiment were not from yesteryear. They stood at a ninety-degree angle to the men passing them by, muskets raised, waiting for the order to fire. Silence, except for the rustling of leaves nearby and the stomp of boots far away.

“...fire!”

Before anyone in the mercenary unit could even process what the shout from the forest means, they were given a practical demonstration. Thunder struck, a thousand times over. There and then, half of the mercenary battalion was wiped out. More than five hundred men, lay dead and wounded – mostly dead. There wasn't much chance of survival after being hit by a lead ball travelling somewhere around 200-300 meters (650-1000 feet) per second. Muskets are also infamously inaccurate, but, when there's so many men packed tightly in a formation from such a short distance... it's more shooting fish in a barrel rather than warfare at that point. The random deviation that a musket ball takes after it leaves the barrel doesn't matter when it'll hit no matter where it swerves to.

Second one. Men fall on the ground dead. Second two. Their comrades realize they are dead, and stop. Second three. They realize they have been attacked. Second four. They look around them. Second five, six, seven. Smoke rises out of the forest where the gunfire came from. Second eight. They realize that a unit of firearms have shot at them. Second nine. Panic, there's a whole unit of infantry that just ambushed them. Second ten. Their captain comes back to his sense. Second eleven. “Back into formation!” Second twelve, thirteen, fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, a frontline of infantry has started heading towards the forest, and the crossbowmen draw their weapons to fire. Second nineteen. The crossbowmen try and spot their enemy in the forest.

Second twenty.

“Fire!”

Most of the muskets have reloaded and are ready to fire again.

Another shower of lead, this time coming as a slow trickle in the next ten seconds as the musketeers fire at will. The mercenary battalion had lost its tight formation, so, not as many of the shots land at them this time. Not to mention their own gunpowder smoke hindering vision for the musketeers. Another half of them died, the rest of the bullets either landing harmlessly on the ground or hitting the formation behind them.

With only a quarter of them remaining, their officer shot, and more shots incoming, the mercenary unit broke and its men fled. A thousand men, and a few more from a nearby unit, defeated and broken in under a minute. The other unit that was just shot at began maneuvering towards the muskets, breaking formation and rushing over to the forest to overwhelm their ambushers with numbers, or at least scare them into a retreat so that the ambushers won't hurt any other of their allies.

“Break off, retreat!”

That they succeed at long before they make it anywhere near the forest, as Ayomide sounds the horns for retreat. Her battalion dissolved into the forest, heading towards the main line of Brown's troops set atop the hill. Her job here was done. Now it's the turn of the...

“Cavalry!” as exclaimed by one of the enemy soldiers, one of many which had just broken formation to chase off the muskets. They were a unit of lightly-armed levied soldiers, mostly

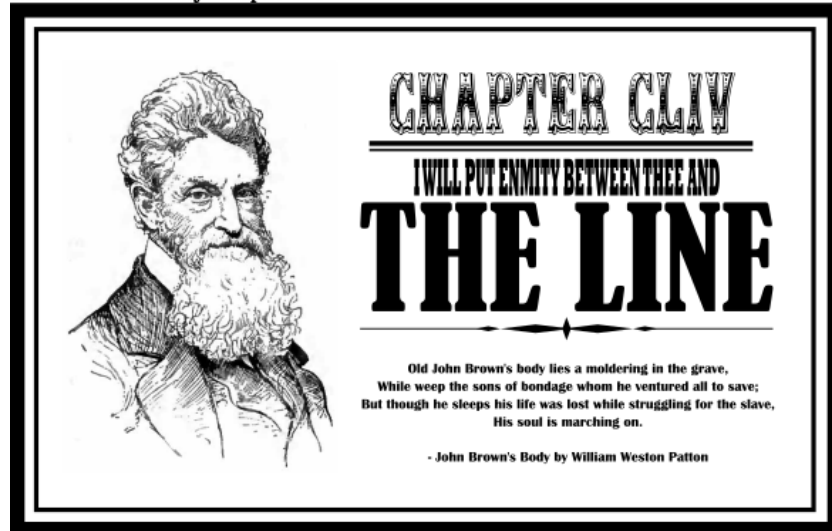
holding shorter spears and swords normally meant for their self-defense back home. Not suitable for holding off cavalry, especially when they've spread out of formation. The 3rd Cavalry Regiment, formerly the Casamonu Host, flew down from the hill for a devastating charge. Most of the levy broke off and retreated before the cavalry made contact with them. The brave few who stood, and the cowardly few who are too paralyzed to move quickly enough, were cut down by lances.

Before any response from nearby, more well-armed units could be formulated, the cavalry retreated back towards the camp of the Republic as fast as it rode down from it. The left flank of the enemy army had completely dissolved before it's seen any combat, seeing as the corpses of its dead men couldn't hope to maintain it.

Twelve thousand men remain, versus five thousand.

Chapter 163: Chapter CLIV – I will put enmity between thee and the line.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 154



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

55th of Spring 5860

Hill on the outskirts of Karabush, State of Karabush

On top of the hill, Brown and his men had stationed themselves behind hastily-constructed earthworks. It was nothing fancy due to the emergency of the situation. Just some raised earth, that'd stagger attackers, and take a few arrow shots in lieu of the men if they were lucky. They were built a bit below the hill, on lower ground, with the pikemen situated behind them. The musketeers, which had broken formation to hastily retreat back in through the safety of the forest, had regathered and reformed way behind the pikemen, their ground higher up enough for them to safely fire at the enemies below them without hitting the pikemen.

Since they were outnumbered, the lines of the republic curved inwards, to form a convex line facing the enemy. The enemy which outnumbered them greatly and could easily outflank them if they so wish. Up from above, near the line of musketeers, Ayomide found the scene down below quite discouraging to say the least. An ocean of men, as colorful as the rainbow with their multitude of banners informing who commanded who, slowly inching closer and closer with killing intent. She was sure they didn't intend to honorably treat the fugitives as war prisoners if they were captured. It was either execution to take revenge for their insubordination, or they'd be sent back to those horrible camps that the Imperials had newly established. Either way, their end was not good if that ocean swept over them and washed them away into the depths of hell-on-earth.

Thus, when faced with such a scene, could she sincerely shout a desperate "Death or freedom!" The sentiment was shared by all the soldiers around her, who joined in the chant by thumping their musket's butts at the earth. It spread from the lines of the musketeers, to those of the pikemen, who all shouted and thumped like so. For a moment, the earth shook in unison under the boots of free men, the air rang out with their chants, and the seas were way too far away to be affected but one must assume even they were moved by such a display.

Then, a call of the bugle that overpowered all and silenced all. A call, to action. To “ready arms!” The flintlock mechanisms of the muskets clinked and clanked ever so silently, audible only due to the silence. Ayomide didn’t really have an easy way to gauge distance, but her eyes had a good feel for distance. Distance that they had to be careful for, as the musketeers carried limited ammunition. Wasting it on shots that would likely not land would not be a good idea. So, Ayomide held her hand up, and up, and up... until she could see the whites in their eyes.

“In ranks, fire!” A downward swing of the hand, followed by a deadly volley of fire down at the densely packed men down below. No armor, no shield, no prayer could protect from a giant lead ball flying at several hundred miles per hour. Truly a force of nature, packed tightly into a barrel of man’s creation. Unpleasant to be on either side, though, one has to admit being at the receiving end of it is ever so slightly less pleasant. The musketeers got off two volleys before their attackers close in for a melee. Normally the crossbowmen would try and stay around to exchange volleys before the rest of the army entered melee, but they were far outranged by gunpowder weaponry.

Eleven thousand men remain, versus five thousand.

However, before they were able to close off, the pikemen showed off a neat little trick: The atlatl. Most of them were not trained well in it, but, it was a one-handed ranged weapon that they could fire while they held on to their pike with their other hand. No harm in letting off a volley or two. Their copper-tipped javelins flew forth, mostly getting lodged in and deflected by shields and armor, but the act itself was enough to give a slight scare to the enemy at least.

The three thousand pikemen then raised their pikes, ready to meet the onslaught of enemy soldiers. Their weapons were like a porcupine, except much, much angrier, lined up in sharp rows, keeping the enemy from getting too close.

Most of the enemy army was equipped with weapons of different types and lengths; weapon standardization being a concept that was far away to them. Most of them being mercenaries of various stripes and levies of various quality, they lacked the discipline and equipment to properly break into a line of pikes... not that mattered when they were enough to begin surrounding the pikes with sheer numbers. Ayomide’s regiment was in danger as well, with the pike wall now unable to protect them.

The walls were closing in, in both senses of the word. Ayomide’s regiment was continuing to fire, on the edges of the enemy formation which was surrounding the pike wall. The enemy and its allies were too close together for her to comfortably fire her canon, without potentially causing unacceptable friendly fire.

Seven thousand men remain, versus four thousand.

A few of the enemy units had broken off, their officers calling for retreat as the pike wall refused to budge. Brown and Shinasi were in the middle of the pikes, shouting orders and doing their best to just. Hold on. Hold on to dear life, hold on the dear liberty, hold on to the only things that they truly could call their own.

Ammunition ran dry. The muskets fired no more, with Ayomide having had to retreat a bit away to protect herself against any stragglers-by trying to attack her formation. She could retreat, further and further, live to fight another day. Or live to retreat more and more, to gain some semblance of freedom that may be lost if this whole rebellion is to be fizzled out there and then. Live, at least, at least live somehow... for a moment, she does hesitate.

Only for the briefest, most minute of moments.

“Alright, you all know what to do.”

Ayomide took out her sword, and her comrades-in-arms took out their bayonets. They attached it to the ends of their muskets, to make themselves count amongst the pikemen. Without having prepared anything, she was far less an eloquent a speaker compared to Brown. However, her brief words still ringed true:

“We’re far away. From here, we can charge. One last charge, gentleman and ladies. Make it count.”

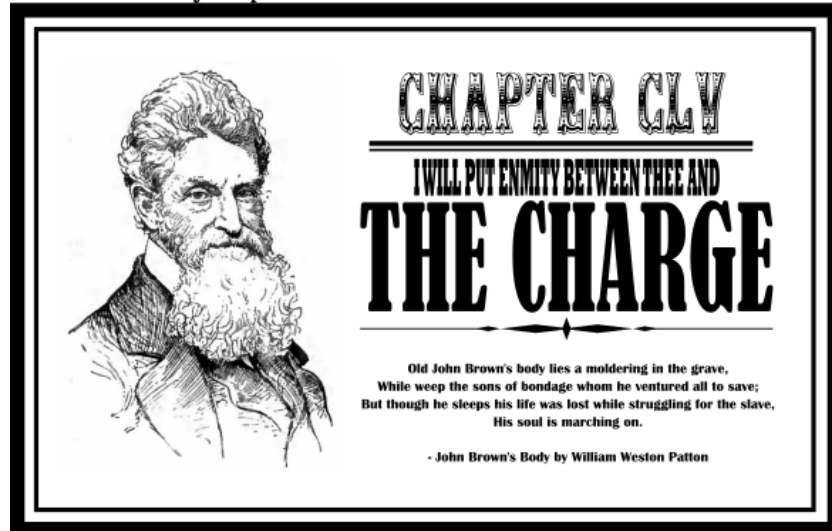
They begun walking, at a quick pace, before they begun truly running. A war cry. A shout, of desperation, “liberty or death!”, and to death they intended to run lest liberty not show itself. The veterans, the best of the best from the League, now of the Republic. The most ferocious, the elite, who have seen a few battles before then, to whom charging to the death is now a norm.

The musketeers made contact with the enemy troops who have all turned around to focus on their enemy.

To liberty, or to their deaths.

Chapter 164: Chapter CLV – I will put enmity between thee and the charge.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 155



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

55th of Spring 5860 Karabush, State of Karabush

On top of the walls of Karabush, was a party that was also participating in the battle between the Republic and the Empire: Harriet Tubman and co., who had all gathered on top of the walls to watch the battle unfold. The old woman was watching the battlefield like a hawk, muttering something or another under her breath with each movement that either of the sides made.

All of the men on the walls were watching with their lids half-closed, all of them equally on the way to starvation. The only thing keeping them up was hope at this point. Hope, and some coffee that Tubman had requisitioned from the basement of a merchant. It had been heavily watered down so that every man could partake in it, but it was coffee. Quite expensive because it was imported all the way from Ginye. Worth it since today is the big day.

The men's hopes were almost immediately shattered when, even to those who were not experienced scouts like General Tubman, the enemy's numerical superiority was obvious. The men of the Republic looked like a little sand castle which were about to be wiped out by an Imperial ocean coming down upon them... and even with musket fire and cavalry charges picking off the flanks, the pikes were still greatly outnumbered.

Kyauta asked the question that was on everyone's mind: "General, when do we charge? Or, or do we take this opportunity to retreat?"

"Shush." Tubman raised a solitary finger towards Kyauta's lips. "Five..."

Kyauta was about to ask for what the significance of "five" was, only stopping because the old woman did just "shush" her out. A few seconds passed, thirty of them in total, before she gets her answer. The 1st Ranger Regiment fires, the sounds of gunpowder exploding being heard all the way from the walls of Karabush. and Tubman muttered a "six...". She knows very well how many

rounds of ammunition the allied regiment carries, ten rounds, and that they'll all be out at the same time due to firing together in ranks.

Tubman took the half a minute of downtime to give her explanation "...at nine, we begin running down, to charge the enemy ourselves. Captain Ayomide should affix bayonets and charge once their ammunition runs out. We should arrive right after them."

"What if she doesn't?" asked Kyauta, looking at the musketeers down below which had turned into a cloud of smoke at this point.

"Then she's not Ayomide" simply replied Tubman. "Seven. Line up the men right next to the gate, young lady. Get them ready to head out."

The men of the Fifth Infantry Regiment and the local National Guard streamed down, Kyauta doing her best to get them into some sort of formation. Their relative inexperience, combined with how exhausted they are from the siege, made it to a job akin to herding cats.

"Eight..."

Tubman came rushing down too, pistol in one hand and axe on the other. She was counting down, to around when the next volley should arrive. The gates to the city were wide open to allow for their sortie. If they fail here, it'll be laughably easy for their enemy to take the city. Not to mention that Brown and his men were completely surrounded... if they're wiped out, there isn't much of an army left for the Republic to defend itself. In short:

"Four, three, two, one... Nine! Liberty or death, folks. Forward, at a brisk walk. Don't exhaust yourself by running until you can see the white in their eyes."

So, the exhausted men marched forward, pikes pointing up as they rested on the men's shoulders. The field strewn with men who died before they could make their way to the main engagement happening a minute's walk away from Tubman's regiment.

"Ten."

In the distance, a last volley of musket fire. Followed by brief silence, before shouts of "Liberty or death!" ring out across the battlefield.

"That must be Ayomide's regiment... Are we ready, folks? Drop your pikes down! Spread out as wide as you can!"

The enemy is getting closer and closer... so are their allies surrounded by the enemy. They're too focused on defeating Brown and Shinasi's regiment to notice Tubman's regiment approaching them. A force of around eight hundred, with Tubman having lost many men to disease exacerbated by starvation. Nothing too shocking for siege warfare all in all. The old woman summons up the last of the strength left in her voice, raising her axe and replying to the battle cry coming from Ayomide's regiment:

"LIBERTY OR DEATH!"

Suddenly, it's as if life returned to her tired and beaten men. They joined in on the shout, and began running towards the enemy. To the enemy that was like an ocean they crashed down on, like a wave following an even bigger wave. Some of the Imperials were immediately slaughtered with their

backs turned towards Tubman's men, while those who turned around to meet their attack were pushed back from both sides as the pikes began marching forward. Now the roles had reversed, from the surrounding the fugitives to the fugitives surrounding them. Not to mention...

"The cavalry is here!"

The Casamonu Host had taken this opportunity to begin peppering the exposed sides of the enemy their arrows. Charging in wasn't really possible since their horses could potentially trample their own allies.

Six thousand men remain versus three-and-a-half thousand.

Steadily, the Imperials saw themselves having lost their advantage and having lost so many of their own. Over ten thousand casualties, and for what? A remote town? A remote town, to be taken to fulfill the whims of some Chancellor many kilometers away. "fighting the Demon King" seemed less and less of an enticing prospect with each passing second. Peppered with voluminous musket fire on the way, then javelins, then the sharp tips of these pikes and now arrow fire from the cavalry...

To the outside observer, a rout may seem spontaneous, as if thousands of men are connected by a hivemind and have decided to give up all together. It begins with one man turning around, lost in the crowd, turning his back and running away from his comrades. Then another looks at him, looks at all the enemies approaching him, and decides that this is a good idea. And then another, and another... before their officer can regain control, his already decimated regiment has dissolved into thin air. Then the men of the regiment right next to them sees this, then the other regiment over, and... in a minute or two, the enemy line has completely shattered and given up on the attack.

The men of the republic marched and rode forth, to pursue the enemy and to capture as much of them as possible. Like petals in the wind, the once mighty army of fifteen thousand had completely dispersed into nothing.

Zero men remain against three-and-a-half thousand.

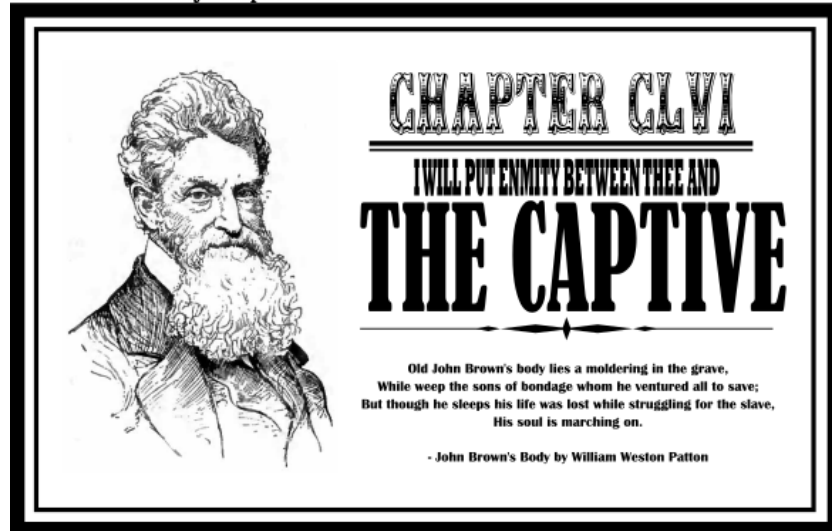
Corpses littered the once blooming spring fields, corpses covered with countless banners of noble houses and mercenary companies who have gone virtually extinct today after losing so many members. Helmets, spears, swords, so many human lives, so much material loss too... all to deny another their liberty. Thus, the dead shall remain dead, to be interred to their final resting place by roving bands of priests, graverobbers and then priests again. The standard result for any battle: a rich microcosm of waste and human suffering.

For today, all of the above concerns anybody none. The men of the Republic rest, to surely fight another day. Whether it is victory or loss, no matter how justified and righteous the fight, it is still a horrible fight.

On the 55th Spring of 5860, the Battle of Karabush concluded with a costly yet decisive victory for the Republic. A quarter of its men were made casualties, and yet they had survived for another day.

Chapter 165: Chapter CLVI – I will put enmity between thee and the captive.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 156



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

55th of Spring 5860 Outskirts of Karabush, State of Karabush

“May the Lord bless you, General Tubman. I am glad to see you alive.”

“May the Lord bless you too, Captain Brown. Gladder still, to see you alive.”

Two old comrades-in-arms share a firm handshake. Soldier around them march to-and-fro, clearing the wounded and the dead from the battlefield. It’s been an arduous march, an even more arduous march before it, and an arduous siege. Yet, they’re united once more on the open field, alive and well to fight another day.

“Please, sit down, you’ve been starving for-” Brown’s attempt at dragging Tubman to a tent and a seat was rejected with a shake of her hand.

“Do the Devil sit down? Then you very well know, Captain Brown, that neither do I to stop his machinations.” Tubman caught a nearby soldier trying to carry a wounded comrade by himself, and began immediately carrying the man on the other side. “Now, git, save the sentimentality for when either of us are in the grave!”

“At your command, General Tubman.” Brown gave a salute to the old woman, before swiftly retreating back to do the Lord’s work amongst the common soldiery.

56th of Spring 5860 Outskirts of Karabush, State of Karabush

“Oh, how the mighty fall.”

The words above, mocking and spiteful, were muttered by the abolitionist catgirl wizard currently occupying the front of the high priest's view. She was sitting on a table, legs and arms crossed, looking down on the man who had been disarmed and sat on the chair. A total inversion where the two should be in proper Gemeinplatzish society, happening here at night in this tent. The Army of the Republic had stayed outside of Karabush for today, to not strain the city's already starving population. Only provisions from the army itself had been sent to Karabush, to temporarily relieve the city before trade and agriculture normalized around the area.

"...what are you going to do with me?" asked the high priest. Might as well ask, considering he could be dead in a few moments.

"Oh, I don't know. Start by removing your nails one by one- okay, I'm joking, don't look at me like you're about to piss your pants. The old man would get mad at me if I hurt you, because one has to be merciful and whatnot." Ayomide shrugged, only one simple shrug. Oh, the slavers hurt them so much, torture them endlessly, but the moment she suggests that the same might be done to them... quite hypocritical, isn't it? "Bloody milksops, you lot."

Clearly the insult to his courage affected the high priest the most. He is about to stand up, before he remembers the fact that the woman in front of him is armed and he is in fact not. "H-hey, I thought you wouldn't hurt me!"

Ayomide scoffed "Hey, I meant physically, nothing says I can't torment you by laughing at you. It's not against the constitution to call you a cur. Cur. Cur cur cur."

"Stop it! I am a man of the Divine--"

"-cur cur cur cur cur--"

"Are you even listening to me?! You will be punished for your transgressions in this world and the one after!"

"Sorry, I don't understand the curish language well, could you repeat?"

Ayomide was laughing her tailside off while the holy man struggled more and more to maintain what composure he had in this, admittedly quite stressful, situation. The slave rebellion had already been playing with everyone's nerves, then there was the whole business of summoning an army, marching, the siege, all to be toppled by a force of fugitives several times smaller than them and be captured in war. The man was equally broken and furious.

Suddenly, Ayomide's ears perked up, and she immediately jumped off the table. "Oh, looks like it's time for me to go. See ya!" She ran out of the room and disappeared from view, leaving one confused priest alone in the room.

A few seconds later, an old man entered the room. Unassuming, outside of the magnificent beard flowing down from his face. Following him was someone that the high priest could identify as belonging to the temple, albeit someone who was of much lower ranking than him. The priest courteously bowed to the high priest. The old man sat down behind the table, examining the high priest in the meanwhile.

"Good evening, mister. My name is John Brown, acting Commander-in-Chief of the Federal Republic of Gemeinplatz, and this is Vaiz the Priest." The old man extended a hand to the head

priest, who understood it to be an otherworlder's handshake. He took the hand, and they had an amicable handshake.

The holy man replied "High Priest Carl of Ancoire, faithful servant of the Divine and His Upmost Eminence Head Priest Castellan."

Vaiz nodded at Brown. "He indeed bears the regalia of a high priest." A taller cap than the one Vaiz had, with red silk wrapped around it, plus a robe with plentiful gold embroidery. A big shot of the Temple of the Divine, right here in this very room.

"...and pray tell, what does that exactly mean?" asked the Brown in the room who couldn't feel any sort of divine presence from the holy man in front of him.

"That means he graduated at the top of his class at a temple school, likely studying since a young age, was promoted to the Council of Priests in Ancoire, and spent decades in faithful service to the Temple until he was promoted for his merit and qualities...? Right?"

Carl's gaze shifted farther and farther away from Vaiz as he naively spoke. Vaiz too lost his enthusiasm and naivete with each word he uttered. In the end, he had one question: "What's your surname?"

"...Earlywatch."

"Goodness..." Vaiz could only heave a deep sigh, shake his head, and lose all his reverence against the man in front of him. "Familial connections. He got here through familial connections. The Head Priest is an Earlywatch too."

"It's always the Earlywatch around these parts, isn't it?" Brown was already sick by the second Earlywatch crossing their path. "I am sorry to inform you, Mister Earlywatch, but your family doesn't mean anything anymore. Not anything more than the money we can ransom you for."

Carl had already understood what little value he had from the vile mockery he had gotten by that catgirl... He only felt safe now because he thought of himself to be in more "civilized" company with these two men. Quite scared, quite scared was he, of being cut open by the people who he saw as savages.

"There's a whole bunch of people outside who are not happy with your... *our* kind. If you wish to make safe passage back, your only hope is us." Vaiz drove the point home, his hands over his heart in a manner much holier compared to the man who was supposedly holier than thou. "So, please, help us as much as you can. To ensure your safe passage."

Tensing up in his seat, Carl had been trying to crawl back and back – but he couldn't, because he was on a sofa. So all he could do was melt under the gaze of these two men, and, surrender... "I... I- I'll call over my page, I'll find him if you let me see the prisoners, and send him off to inform my family. They should be back with the ransom shortly."

"Thank you for your cooperation." Brown called over one of the guards outside the tent, to escort Carl to find his page.

The bad-cop good-cop act with Ayomide was, as demonstrated, a great success. Brown would have to thank Watanabe later for suggesting the technique.

Chapter 166: Interlude – Those who have been left behind.

“To be an agent of the Independent Republic’s Surveyors is to take on a nigh-incomprehensibly important mission. You may see it as just taxation but, revenue is the lifeblood of our boys in the front!”

There Nirmal is, the dark elf who was once the secretary of a certain Kim Seong-min. Now he led his own army, an army certainly mightier than any armed with swords. For it’s an army armed with the pen, or more exactly the quill, and the ledger. A terrifying force, all packed like sardines on the back of a cart driven by two horses.

Today, the IRS would be deployed for the first time. Nirmal took a look at the men in the cart. Half of them were bookkeepers from the city, those who were already experienced in the job, while the other half were freemen who had been educated in the elementary schools. Both those sides had been partnered up to each other, so that the freemen would learn accounting and the bookkeepers would learn to be less racist... hopefully. There had certainly been some protests to them working as equals to the “fugitives”, but receiving pay had shut the bookkeepers up for now. They had family to feed, necessities to buy, and... at this point, it seemed like the fugitives were going to stay for a little while.

Nirmal took his attention back to the ledger. A gift from Doctor Rabanowicz before she and the army had marched off to Karabush: the official census of the year 5860, with added data from the survey she had conducted. For most, it’d look like a droll piece of work with countless numbers stacked on top of each other... which is what it exactly was. However, to someone obsessed with number and accounting, it was a work of art. So much data, packed in so tightly into those columns in such beautiful-yet-hasty handwriting... Nirmal could kiss that ledger. He didn’t, because kissing ledgers is commonly seen as a weird thing to do.

Up the tarmac road (freshly tarred by the National Guard of Zon’guldac who had volunteered to work on the roads Republic-wide) the cart went, until it passed by the gates of Libertycave. Yes, gates! Building grand stone walls to properly surround such a gate would take years, but, the National Guard of Libertycave had volunteered to at least construct a grand brick gate to welcome visitors into the city. With giant letters readable from all the way down from the cart the gate read “55.III.5859”, the founding day of the republic which by now was two seasons old, half a year, the product of which now stood tall above them. Libertycave was surrounded by palisades which stood way less grand, but did their job to protect the place from wild animals and monsters. There wasn’t any toll entering the city like many others under Imperial jurisdiction, nor were there tolls along the roads of the Republic, to not stifle free movement and trade.

The roads had been cleared of robbers looking to extract such tolls by the men of the National Guard who regularly patrolled along the Imperial Highway system, and with the absence of nobility, there wasn’t anyone left capable of enforcing such a toll along the highway. So, a great flow of men and carts entered and exited Libertycave, looking to do their business. Coal and steel from Zon’guldac, grain from Karabush, hazelnuts from Bolipoli, raw copper from Mount Curry, livestock from nomads beyond the mountain, every minute a microcosm of the Republic passing through the gates. Nirmal and co. melted into this microcosm, having to wait a while in the traffic of carts of men before they could push through.

Through the gates and palisades stood Libertycave proper. Nowhere near as big as, say, the Imperial capital or Ancoire, but it certainly was large for how far away from the center of Gemeinplatz it was. More than a thousand people, it had been growing so rapidly that the census was probably wrong by this point, all living up in the mountain. No longer hiding in the dark, rather shining as a bright beacon of freedom in Gemeinplatz. Freshly-laid tarmac complete with drainage. Signposts naming streets laid out in a neat grid; the dwarves had insisted that they be allowed to assist with the urban planning, and they had practically dug up their subterranean organization up to the surface... not to mention all the buildings they had also dug in to Mount Curry itself. Libertycave grew not only on the surface but underground as well, with the carved-out windows of the mountainside peeking down at the surface inhabitants.

With how organized the streets were, Nirmal found it easy to make their way into the office of the IRS. It was a small building, only two stories tall as most buildings in Libertycave, nowhere close to the offices he had seen in Seoul. Now that their tax-collection was done in the relatively smaller town of Casamonu, it was time for them to start their round of collection in Libertycave. People had already lined up outside the door, anxiously waiting the arrival of the dreaded species known as the “tax collector”.

“Alright, please, let us pass-” It took a second for the line to allow for the passage of the IRS officers. Soon they were through, and, into their office lined up with desks and even more quills and ledgers. After the officers were set up, without any time to rest, Nirmal had to give the signal “We’re open!”



Immediate cacophony, as the line outside poured into the office. Unlike what Brown and Rabanowicz had initially planned, the income taxes weren't to be paid in money. In practice, it had quickly turned out that most people in Gemeinplatz in fact did not have much liquid assets in hand. Coins were a matter of nobles, stewards and merchants, for exchanging goods and services between foreign places or storing wealth. Most people in a pre-industrial society as Gemeinplatz owned, produced and received goods and services rather than money. Thus, the income tax was to be paid by taking a part of what a household produced from a pre-set list of taxable goods... which is why

Nirmal was currently dealing with a live chicken being shoved in his face by a concerned citizen looking to pay her part.

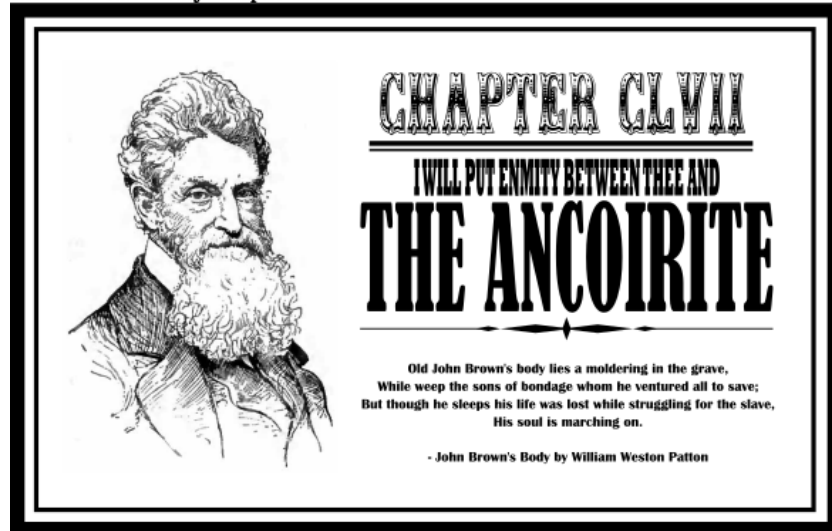
The head tax collector Nirmal got an assistant to take the chicken away, next being presented a head of cabbage, then a bar of copper, so on and so forth which were all taken away to be stored while his assistants recorded every new entry. The fate of these goods would be decided later once they were all recorded down. Perhaps the chickens would be sent away to homesteads in some new mass-poultry program, perhaps the cabbages to the Army of the Republic to make provisions, perhaps the copper would be minted into coinage... or there was also the option of selling items off, to turn them into cash. For now, all Nirmal was concerned about was not having the office be littered in chicken excrement.

Coin itself did occasionally make its way however. From shopkeepers and merchants residing in Libertycave, they made their contribution of coin. Nirmal suspected that the merchants were underselling how much they made, but enforcing taxation was another matter, one that he'd perhaps work on with a surprise inspection to whoever he suspected was underpaying. A check of the merchant's own ledgers, and the truth would be revealed, unless the merchant in question was cooking the books which... was *possible*. It was possible. That's about how much Nirmal could afford to think on that matter right now. The IRS would have to think about dealing with tax-avoidance later, *after* it had survived this first round of taxation. The freemen were complying with taxation well-enough, for now.

Thus, after about an hour, Nirmal relaxed his shoulders and got into the groove. Live chicken, bag of grain, bar of copper, live chicken, bag of coin, grain, coin, chicken, copper, cabbage, cabbage, grain, coin... a mug of tea, to keep himself from falling asleep, then back to work... such was the work of the not-so-brave-but-diligent unnamed men whose work was perhaps most crucial to keeping the Republic alive.

Chapter 167: Chapter CLVII – I will put enmity between thee and the Ancoirite.

Rise of the Slave Army - Chapter 157



MMXXIV-MMXXVI - The Cabbage Preacher

59th of Spring 5860 The Beige Temple, Hallow Duchy of Ancoire

A grand procession enters the grand grounds of The Beige Temple. A dozen men, the newly-ransomed and freed High Priest Carl in the middle of them followed up by Former-Mayor Gabriel of Bolipoli.

A procession of doomed men.

“Do you think sir, that we will receive amnesty?” idly wondered Carl. He paused to greet the pair of griffon statues at the beginning of the road to the Beige Temple.

“You, are getting demoted. I, most likely exiled, since I have nothing left to be demoted to” replied Carl’s newfound companion in misery, Gabriel. He stopped to greet the griffon statues too, the protectors of this hallow space. Then there was another pair of statues. A pause, to greet. Then another, and another, and another... it took five minutes to arrive at the end of a road which should take a minute at most.

Then a pair of statues, facing each other from across the road. A man, and a woman, most likely. Truth be told, nobody knew what these were anymore, for they were from the Empire of yore. A man, with a buttoned-up gambeson and a very simple helmet, staring across at a woman who had her face covered with her hand. Was she mourning? Embarrassed? Yawning? Who were they and why? Time immemorial had weathered them, made them indistinguishable, an enigma. Their style was cubic and simple, a hallmark of Ancient Gemeinplatzish art. Carved of travertine rock, perhaps from Gemeinplatz, perhaps imported, perhaps fallen from the Heavens as some believed.

Pushing forth, the procession found themselves in the main square of the temple complex. Men pushing back and forth, from building to building, tending to the administrative needs of the Temple of the Divine. A man running with a stack of paper there, his assistant running behind him

with a pen here, a third clumsy man about to bump into both over yonder, so on and so forth. Pontifical guards stand on their podiums, completely still, not much on guard. It's the Beige Temple. No fool would start anything here, so, there's nothing to be on guard for. Their multicolored feathers and gold-encrusted plate armor are there to serve as living statues. From down below they have a view of the city. A city rather than the lame towns common in this remote part of Gemeinplatz, the grand city of Ancoire. Three hundred thousand people, three hundred thousand if one could believe it! For the peasants down in Bolipoli and such, this was simply impossible to imagine.

For Carl and Gabriel, it was a standard Ninthday. It remained impressive nonetheless. A brief moment of refuge, to stare at the countless buildings and smoking chimneys, to get lost among the ocean of little ants scurrying down there.

The respite however, was brief. They had business to do, or more accurately, business to be done to them. They turned around, to begin ascending the stairs to the room of the Head Priest. Next to the stairs, reliefs. Walls filled to the brim with them. Men, women, horses, men on horses, horses on men, rushing forward, a sword, then on the other side people sitting, seemingly talking to each other... In the same cubic, abstract style as the statues in the front. One couldn't really tell whether it depicted the events of several hundred, maybe even thousands, of years ago. It could have happened a few days ago for all they could tell from these abstract, weathered figures. So long ago had the ancients fought as they did, for reasons that now felt as vague as these reliefs did.

A few more steps up, and now they were in front of the Beige Temple that gave the whole complex its name. Walls made of beige stone, not colored in any way, looking hallow in its monotone purity. Square columns, a rectangular building several people tall, that looked imposing in how monotone and rigid it looks. On the wall behind the columns, writing, carved from the top to the bottom of the wall. Written in what the otherworlders call "Latin script", in a language that none in Gemeinplatz can read anymore.

The procession surrendered their weapons to the guards in front of the door, and made their entry into the Temple. A clank, a wheeze, and the door was open for them. For their entry, to the most hallow office in Gemeinplatz.

Silence.

The head priest was there, on his throne, seated. Purple and white robes, a white beard that flowed down even further than the robes... The procession obediently and slowly walked. Dragged their feet even, slow as they can to show the proper reverence. They stopped right in front of the head priest's throne, still silent, all taking off their hats and helmets to prostrate before him. For another minute the silence remained, then another minute, then a third, all still prostrating in the meanwhile. Not a subtle whine, or wince, dare come from these men.

"You may get up."

They all got up, almost in unison with how expectant all of them had become to just straighten their backs. Perhaps a bit too eagerly but... the head priest seemed to not care too much about that, gracious as he was. Still, he gave them another minute of silence for their offense. All the man uncomfortably shifted around the place, trying not to make it too obvious that they'd really like it if the silence could be broken right about now.

"Patience. The Divine commandeth patience."

Another minute. They're being taught a lesson in etiquette.

"You may speak."

The procession looked at each other. What were they supposed to say? Did the head priest not know? They awkwardly shifted around, before Carl was silently and wordlessly elected amongst them to speak. He took a tiny step forward.

"Your Upmost Eminence, we have come to you after the... unfortunate events in Karabush. We humbly surrender ourselves to you, Your Upmost Eminence, and beg for your mercy." With that, they prostrated again. Another minute.

"You may get up. I shall consult the texts, to think of a suitable punishment for you. For now, you are dismissed."

With that, the procession looked taken aback... before they all bowed down, and even prostrated, begging for mercy, again and again and... "You are dismissed! Guards! You too. I need a moment."

Thus, they were dismissed, and so were the guards. The head priest was all of a sudden alone, in his solemn hall. He looked up at the ceiling, the countless tiles and patterns dancing around there... then he heaved a deep sigh. "What are they thinking, 'have mercy, have mercy', like dogs... Their families would burn down the whole Temple if I even so much as demoted them."

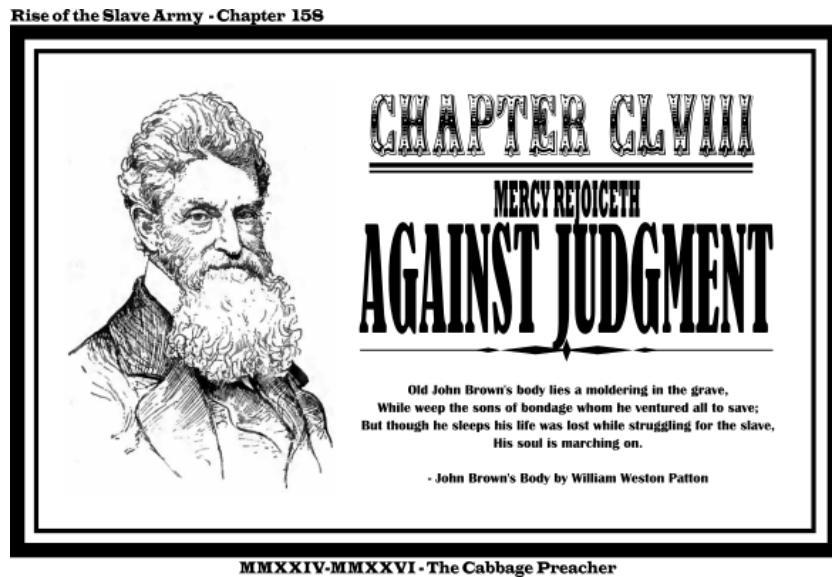
Head Priest Castellán grumbled, and shook his head, again and again. No, it was too much trouble. He had spent countless years lobbying, courting, shaking hands... Being the highest spiritual authority in Gemeinplatz meant noting when the temporal authority wanted your head for touching their precious seventh sons or whatever.

"Three days... that should be good enough." Castellán would summon them up in three days, make a speech about Divine mercy, and let them go. Three days to keep a veneer of fairness, as if he had deliberated longer than a few minutes.

Now that judgement was done... "...how do we deal with these fugitives?"

That was the million libra question on his, and everyone else's, mind.

Chapter 168: Chapter CLVIII – Mercy rejoiceth against judgment.



59th of Spring 5860
Karabush, State of Karabush

“A bit up... that’s it, there you go, leave it there.”

Five stars. The blue-white-green once again flew over Karabush, hanging on a pole that had been set right next to the old mayor’s office.

Casamonu, Zon’guldac, Karabush, Bolipoli and Changra.

With the grand coalition defeated at the Battle of Karabush, the Republic could now securely claim to span five states. Changra had yet to be taken, but... it was a border county, with its army having been recently defeated. One regiment led by General Tubman had been sent to secure the town, accompanied by a dozen pencil-pushers to actually establish the presence of the Republic in the area.

Ayomide slid down the pole, returning to the ground where Shinasi was waiting for her. He caught her before she made contact with the ground, briefly taking her in his arms before she was gently set down back on the ground. “Phew, you’re heavier than I imagined for your size.”

“...any other lady would kill you over that.” Ayomide, however, sufficed by giving him a flick on the nose “Consider yourself lucky that I have mercy.”

“Ow- Is this mercy?” Shinasi rubbed his poor nose.

“You are still alive, no? It very much is. Lese majesty would usually get you the death sentence.” Ayomide turned around, and gave him a smack on the legs with her tail “Come now, don’t just stand there.”

“Aye aye, Lady Orange.” He had no choice but to follow, falling besides her as usual. “Where to?”

“Back to the old man, of course. He told us to be back after lunch.” They dissolved into the crowd of the town, who were back out for their usual business. A few days ago, they had been driven to nigh-starvation. Today, Ayomide was passing by people who were standing besides stalls and casually doing their grocery shopping. “It’s unbelievable how quickly people can go back to normal, huh.”

“Ain’t that good. Hopefully we’ll be able go back to normal before we become as old as the captain.” Shinasi was itching to laze around in the village, at least for a few months before setting off to do adventure.

“I’d rather not return to *my* normal” replied Ayomide simply.

“Ah, I mean- I mean, you know, like, a new normal. Otherwise, of course, it’s quite a waste if we’re back to the old normal.” Shinasi gave a defeated sigh. Of course, he’d rather not return to *that* normal.

“Heh. For a second there I thought you were an Imperial.” Ayomide gave him an approving pat on the cheek.

“If I was, I would be running away from the scary lady with a sword, I feel like.”

“Oh, I’m not *that* scary, am I?”

Such idle chatter continued as they headed down the street, and out of the walls where the army of the Republic had stationed itself for now. The camp was still where it was before the battle, with carts running between the camp and Karabush supplying the troops and the town. It had actually taken a few days before the first troops even made their way inside the walls; Brown had ordered the city be relieved first with food, and for the army to not burden its starving population any further by staying inside its walls.

Thus, the tent town stayed in its place. Most of the soldiers had gone down into Karabush at this time of day, doubtlessly to find some rest and entertainment in this brief moment of respite. One tended to miss civilized life after being deprived of it for a couple of days. The ones who stayed in the camp gave greetings to the captains while they passed by. There wasn’t any requirement to salute anyone in the Republic’s army, but the privates still tended to respect their captains enough to stop and wave hello at least if they were not busy. The few who had chosen to stay in the camp were having lunch by a campfire, their palette a bit more varied thanks to purchases made from traders passing by. Like vultures the men of commerce had descended upon the siege being broken, to make bank on the desperate people of the town who would really like some salt to go along with the grain that the Republic had distributed.

Shinasi and Ayomide had already had lunch in the town however, a lovely luncheon the local adventurer’s guild, so they moved on to their business. The business being at a tent that didn’t look too different to all the other tents. Usually, the commander of an army would be at the center, with a grand tent befitting his post. The only thing that distinguished it was the stars-and-stripes, which the people of Gemeinplatz understood as being Brown’s personal banner. Of course, he had tried to tell them that it was supposed to be the flag of “the United States”, but that was a harder concept to get people to understand. The concept of a nation was yet far away for the people of Gemeinplatz.

Entering the tent, they were greeted by the usual: John Brown crawling on the floor, chalk in hand, staring at a map laid before him. Accompanying him was Priest Vaiz, who was standing a bit away, staring down at the old man. It was the same map all the way back from Mount Curry, acquired in

the copper mine owned by that one Satō-Wang. It still served him well, though it was littered with annotations and comments by now. “Welcome, welcome.” He greeted his guests, getting up from the floor.

“Good morning old man, young lady and young man at your service.” Ayomide added a brisk wave of her hands at the end.

“I will require your service, yes.” Brown looked at Vaiz, then back to his guests “I had a brief talk with Mister Vaiz here, along with a few of the freemen from Ancoire. The verdict is clear: a direct counterattack towards Ancoire would be a mistake.”

This was followed up by an obvious question from Ayomide: “Why?”

“Ancoire is a big city. How many people did you say it had again, Vaiz?” The tip of a well-used block of chalk pointed towards the priest in question.

“In the upper two hundred thousands sir, according to the last census I had taken part in. It might be at three hundred thousand now. The census in Ancoire is done every ten years, and I had left before the last one.”

“So, let’s say, three hundred thousand in urban Ancoire. How much do we have in the Republic, in total?”

Vaiz had to pause for a second, searching for the numbers. He had many numbers in his head, way too many of them to count. “Twenty-nine thousand, according to the last census conducted by Doctor Rabanowicz. We know from the dwarves that their last census of Zon’guldac counted thirty thousand. So, we have around sixty thousand people in the Republic.”

Brown nodded. “So, sixty thousand people are administered by our Republic. With great difficulty, may I remind you. Half of this number, the dwarves in Zon’guldac, practically administer themselves. If we took Ancoire, we’d suddenly have to administer five times the people. If we fail, we’ll be failing thirty hundred thousand people, and only the Lord knows what the consequences of *that* would be.”

Neither Ayomide or Shinasi had seen Ancoire, or any other settlement that large, so they could only imagine... and fail to do so. Shinasi could imagine one thing though, “Wouldn’t such a large city be able to defend itself? That’s a whole lot of people behind some walls.”

“That too is true young man, their head priest clearly didn’t commit all of his forces. A clever decision, considering they already outnumbered us greatly with what they sent. I am not sure if we even currently have enough men to surround and besiege the city, and an outright attack would not end well to say the least, weakened as they may be by their recent defeat.”

“So, we just go somewhere else?” Ayomide shrugged.

“We could, young lady. To our neighbors in Agrilon, or Altstadt, which are way less populated. Or back to Periligoul, to focus on the elves... though, as they stand, they act as a useful buffer between us and the Imperial core. It’s better to leave the elves be for now. Wherever we go though, we’d have to split our resources, to defend against any potential attacks from Ancoire while moving forward. We’re already wading through a swamp, and Ancoire would only serve as a ball and chain attached to our legs that’d slow us down. Thus!” Brown suddenly raised his voice, and declared “We are going to Ancoire.”

Ayomide raised her hand "...wait, you did *just* say it would be a mistake to go there."

"I only said a direct counterattack was a mistake, young lady! Just as it would have been a mistake for us to go to Casamonu while we had a dozen people on a mountain. Not going to Ancoire would be a mistake in fact, to sit by and go for small victories while the much larger Empire prepares to inevitably strike us down. Our Republic is still only crawling around, like an infant, stuck only to the borderlands of the Empire. Just as Casamonu was our birth, Ancoire will be our rebirth."

Thusly, Brown tosses aside the chalk, letting it land on the ground. His hands are free now that theorizing over. Now is time to begin action.

"First order of business is to get the army out of Karabush. Then we shall see what Providence has prepared for us."

Chapter 169: Interlude – Dungeons, dragons and other matters.

Back in Azdavay, where it all started...

“Finest dwarven accessories, right from Aroghlie! Miss, miss, want one of th-”

Shakira simply glared at the peddler. A nasty look that implied that he’d receive a flogging if he kept flogging his goods. The man simply took a few steps back, sufficiently intimidated by the warrior and her ridiculously enormous sword that hung by her back. “By the Divine, this place is crowded nowadays. I thought I’d find peace.”

“It’s surprising, isn’t it? How big this place has grown.” Next to Shakira was her boss, Azra Inkwell. A noble lady, noble enough to bear a surname, considerably of smaller stature than the woman she accompanied. She had bought a few second-hand clothes in Libertycave: a tattered gambeson, dyed a pinkish color to suit her sensibilities, plus a hood to hide her face from anyone who might recognize her. She looked sort of mysterious and “cool”, which she quite liked, liked so much so that she had a silly little grin on her face while she walked alongside Shakira.

Besides them passed a whole assortment of passersby. Porters carrying carts of refined copper, the staple even before the days of the Republic, but there were a whole lot more of them with the highways stimulating trade. Now there was the occasional dwarven porter, who carried a whole lot more than their human counterparts, surprisingly sturdy little men were they. Then a caravan of people who, judging from their tattered clothing and dismal appearance, were newly-rescued. They were led by a member of the National Guard, who was marching them in the direction of Libertycave. The eyes of the fugitives were darting all over the place, as if they were still in disbelief of their newfound freedom.

“So big and so different. At this rate, I’ll have to go somewhere else if I’m to find peace again.” Shakira scowled while she had to wiggle her shoulders around to avoid bumping into the caravan of people.

“Peace? I thought adventurers were supposed to seek action and adventure!” exclaimed Azra.

“Yeah, ‘guess so. Still, there’s like, a difference between a bit of adventure and way too much of it, y’know? The sort of adventure you find in a big place is very different to what you’d find in a small place. You get me?”

“Ah, I see.” Azra nodded, taking in the wisdom of her elder... not that Shakira was her elder by any significant margin, but, she still nodded nonetheless.

“Believe me, if you ever saw the capital... phooey.” Shakira raised her arm way up to accompany her interjection. “It’s way larger than you can comprehend. A whole load of noise, a whole load of people, a whole load of... everything, really. The point is that you don’t get to adventure much over there.”

“Oh, you’ve been to Hauptstadt?”

“Born there, been there.” Shakira waved her hand before Azra got any more questions in however. “It’s not important now. We’re way away from that place. Way, way away.”

Despite Shakira's attempt at making her fall quiet, Azra jumped up to converse the moment Shakira stopped "It's so cool though! An adventurer, all the way from the capital... I should write down your story one day! You must have quite the story, Miss Shakira!"

"I'm sure we all have an interesting story or something, but you don't see everyone yapping about it now do you? Be a good girl now, and don't even tell anyone where 'Miss' Shakira is from."

Azra opened her mouth back up, only to receive the same sort of glare that the bothersome peddler had gotten. "Uhm, okay. Okay."

"Good! We're here." Shakira opened the door to the Adventurer's Guild of Azdavay. The smell inside had somehow not changed since chapter three, though the people inside certainly had. Most of them had died during the initial trek up to Libertycave, and the rest had fallen during the siege of Casamonu. Now there was a whole new roster of adventurers, mostly freemen who had found it financially lucrative to fill the empty seats and do the work that needed to be done. They didn't take notice of the "newcomers" in the building, continuing their idle chatter.

"...old man? Yeah, I was on the frontlines during the Battle of Casamonu and..."

"...she moved to the homestead, now that she's gotten one..."

"...slimes are hard to find now, with all the people on the..."

Such pieces of chatter passed them by as Shakira found an empty spot for both of them to sit. Azra was practically fangirling all over the place, her head turning around and around, soaking in the atmosphere. Her mouth was agape. "A real... a real adventurer's guild..."

"What, they're all over the place... I don't see the appeal." Shakira could only shrug. At least Azra was enjoying whatever she saw in such places. "I'm pretty sure there was one in Casamonu, no? Did you never head there?"

"Oh, no! How could I? A noble lady like me in such a place... it'd be preposterous! Father would've never allowed it." With a playful grin, Azra added "Now that nobility is no longer a thing, however..."

Shakira rolled her eyes "Yeah, yeah, okay, my lady. You'd still look like one if we got you in some right proper clothes."

"You would too if we dressed you up properly! Oh, you looked quite wonderful when we got you into that dress for the new year." Azra was patting at the adventurer-grade leather armor that barely covered anything on Shakira. It did its job, of showing off the fact that she was quite strong physically. More of a fashion piece really, than armor.

"If you say so." Shakira crossed her arms and leaned back, closing her eyes to rest in hopes that Azra would continue gawking at the guild. Instead, her sides were getting poked at by Azra. "What?"

"...don't worry, I think you still look pretty good with what you're wearing right now!" Azra gave a thumbs up on top of her comment.

Shakira didn't bother to turn to Azra or even open her eyes to give a reply. "Thanks? I wasn't worrying about that..." Still, she let her poke at her while she rested.

“Ah, hm... if you’re going to rest, we should have something after we’ve walked all the way here... I’ll get us something really quick! It’ll be on me, don’t worry.”

“Sure, knock yourself out.”

Soon Azra would return with one donut, for the two of them to share. They were the hot new thing, now that the dwarves were setting up donut shops all over the Republic. Sitting back down in the crusty, smelly guild building, Azra could only heave a relieved sigh. “Times sure are changing.”

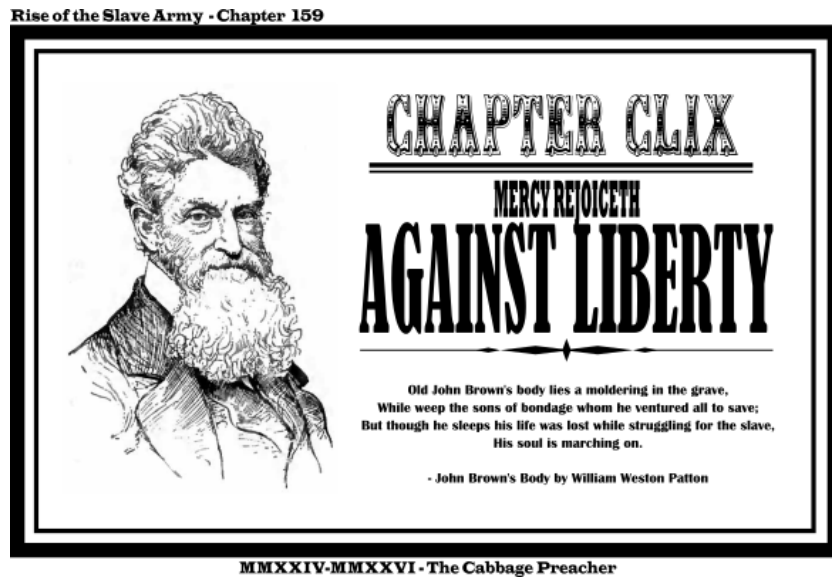
“Hm?”

“I’d elaborate but... hey, we shouldn’t let these get cold.” So, she handed Shakira her donut, and bit down on her own.

Times were changing. Donuts were popular. Nobility was no more.

Two women could enjoy donuts together in peace.

Chapter 170: Chapter CLIX – Mercy rejoiceth against liberty.



60th of Spring 5860
Changra, County State of Changra

“There it is, Changra.” General Tubman pointed towards the town slowly appearing in the distance. So did a few enemy cavalymen in the distance who, upon seeing the army of the Republic approaching, broke and began a retreat towards the town.

Kyauta breathed a sigh of relief “It seems they don’t intend to fight.”

“They’d have to be complete fools to do that now, wouldn’t they?” Behind Tubman was the 3rd Cavalry Regiment, also known as the Casamonu Host, who had moved rapidly to capture Changra. She didn’t lead them – their Hetman did. General Tubman and Kyauta were there for a whole another reason, to bring with them the spirit of the League of Gileadites.

Swiftly the regiment moved forward, to the gate of this small town. It was protected by a simple palisade, plus a modest castle in the middle that towered over the rest of the town. A pretty standard setup small town for the border of Gemeinplatz. The gate was open, with a white banner hung over it. Standing it behind it were a dozen or so lightly armored men, who were what remained of the town’s garrison. They similarly waved a white flag on a pole, with their weapons piled up on the road in front of them.

Now, *that* was a problem. Tubman leaned towards Kyauta to whisper to her “Young lady, do you remember how to do these surrender ceremonies?”

“I’ve seen a bunch of them by now, but I’ve never paid attention” replied Kyauta.

Both sides looked at each other, each anticipating the other to begin the surrender process. General Tubman really wished she had brushed up on her surrender skills. With how fierce the Battle of Karabush was, she was expecting the defenders of this town to at least try and put up some resistance. If they did, they’d be all dead and nobody would have to deal with a surrender.

“May the good Lord above help me” pleaded Tubman, before she got off her horse and walked forward to proceed with the surrender. As she approached the surrendering men, it dawned on her how ridiculous the whole scene must look from the outside. A whole squad of men, trembling and nervous in fear as one old woman approaches them. Anticipant, in fear that their whole town is about to be razed by the savages that they’ve heard so much about.

“I have reasoned this out in my mind: there’s one of two things we have a right to: liberty, or death. No man should take me alive. I should fight for my liberty as long as my strength lasts, and when the time came for me to go, the Lord would let them take me.”

The men were too nervous to listen and understand Tubman’s speech, but the mentioned of the word “death” did nothing to ease their nerves. Tubman continued:

“The Lord has not taken you yet. I believe He may have other plans for you gentlemen. May the rest of your life serve Him well.”

A brief silence, before one of the soldiers dared break it. “Uhm, does, does that mean that we’re spared and you accept our surrender?”

“Yes. Unlike your folk, we’re not savages who take people captive and sell them as property. Now, git.” Thus, the surrender was complete. What little remained of the garrison dissolved itself and went back into town now that their last mission was complete.

Kyauta had dismounted off her horse too, and she walked up to Tubman after the soldiers disappeared “That concludes our mission?”

“That only *starts* our mission. Follow me for a second.” Tubman and Kyauta walked through the streets, passing by houses whose windows were all boarded up... not that there were many windows to board up in the first place, with glass being a luxury commodity in Gemeinplatz. Still, there was a distinct lack of people on the streets. Tubman could see a few uneasy eyes poking out from behind doors that disappeared as they approached. She guessed that rumors about a massive force of nomad cavalry heading their way had made people uneasy.

Any other day in Gemeinplatz, Changra would be getting looted and the surrender would have only acted as a futile plea for mercy. Today however, it was the day of the Republic, and the Casamonu Host would encamp itself right outside Changra to await orders. Speaking of outside Changra, Tubman and Kyauta had arrived at a gate the other side of town. This one was still closed, quite lonely and deserted with no men on watch.

Tubman leaned on the lattice carved into the gate. “There it is. Beyond here.”

Kyauta followed suit, beyond the lattice... there was nothing. The trees had long since disappeared on their march to Changra, so the scenery was the same as what she had seen for the past few hours: vast steppe, nothing but grass as far as the eyes could see. No highway leading out from the gate as was the case for many places in Gemeinplatz. Only a thin desire path squiggling its way to the gate was there.

Vaiz circled his finger around Changra, tracing the name of the town written on the map. “Beyond here, there is no empire. Only a loose confederation of nomads, who know no lord or law, who inhabit these lands. Whether they be outlaws fleeing persecution, peasants seeking a new life away from their lords, adventurers looking for adventure beyond... so on and so forth the legends about these people go. Some of them have been permitted to settle in Gemeinplatz, being hosted by the Empire, hence forming the Hosts in exchange for military service.”

Brown interrupted Vaiz “Thus, there’s untapped population beyond the mountains. Countless free men who live away from what we call civilization. Hardy men already skilled in foraging, husbandry, warfare... You’ve seen how well the Casamonu Host has fought for the Republic. Of course, grazing land is limited in our lands, and Gemeinplatz already has plenty of its shepherds working that land... but, we do have plenty of empty arable land. I imagine a few people beyond Changra would be happy to have their own homestead and settle down if they were provided the land.”

In the former mayor’s residence of Casamonu, it was then decided. Or, well, Brown had decided beforehand, and summoned up the people who’d to the work to explain it to them. Vaiz, who had worked beforehand as a priest among the hosts, to act as an ambassador. Rabanowicz to crunch the numbers, and Nirmal to make sense of them. “We shall spread word of the plenty of available land in the Republic, and promote the Homesteading Act among the people beyond Changra.”

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